Imagining the Australian Nation: Settler-Nationalism and Aboriginality

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(Produced on acid-free paper)
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Statement

I, Anthony Francis Moran, hereby affirm that this thesis, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices is less than 100 000 words.

This thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted before, either for a degree at The University of Melbourne, or elsewhere.

Anthony Moran

November 10, 1999
Abstract

The thesis examines different forms of Australian settler-nationalism, and their impact upon settler/indigenous relations. I examine the way that the development of specific forms of settler national consciousness has influenced the treatment of, thought about, and feeling towards the indigenous as a people or peoples. I claim that discourses of the nation operate, in an ongoing way, as shaping forces in everyday and public policy responses to the collective situation of Australia's indigenous peoples, and to the perception of their place in Australian society.

The first part of the thesis provides a theoretical framework for understanding Australian settler-nationalism, drawing upon major theories of nationalism, postcolonialism and psychoanalysis. I provide a historical and political analysis of white Australia nationalism, emphasising its racist underpinnings, and its influence upon governmental policies of biological absorption and assimilation.

The second part of the thesis analyses relations between settler Australia and indigenous peoples from the 1960s to the present. Drawing upon psychoanalysis, especially that of the British object-relations school pioneered by Melanie Klein, and many contemporary discourses of the nation, I develop an account of two specific modes of settler-nationalism, which I term assimilationist and indigenising. I examine the way that these different modes have influenced and shaped public debates on Aboriginal land rights and the movement for Aboriginal Reconciliation. The major political phases studied include: the events leading up to and surrounding the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976; the Hawke Labor Government's attempt, between 1983 and 1986, to introduce national Aboriginal land rights legislation; what can be broadly characterised as the period "after Mabo", including the political activity stirred by the High Court's historic Mabo decision of 1992, the passing of the Native Title Act 1993, the Wik decision of 1996, the rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party, and the Native Title Amendment Act
1997; and the period of the Government process of Aboriginal Reconciliation from 1991 to the present.
Part One: Settler-Nationalism and the Historical Development of White Australia
Introduction

The central concern of this thesis is with the forms of Australian national consciousness that have developed in settler as opposed to indigenous communities. By settler communities I do not restrict myself to first or second generation immigrants to Australia, but to the whole bloc of the non-indigenous Australian community.¹ I examine the way that the development of specific forms of settler national consciousness has influenced the treatment of, thought about, and feeling towards the indigenous as a people or peoples. I claim that discourses of the nation operate, in an ongoing way, as shaping forces in everyday and public policy responses to the collective situation of Australia’s indigenous peoples, and to the perception of their place in Australian society. Such an analysis calls for a subtle teasing out of the different meanings and projects that inhere in the symbol of nation.

The historical nature of settler/indigenous relations, which I explore in the first part of this thesis, must be grasped if one is to understand relations in contemporary society. A cursory glance at any of the debates that have surrounded, for example, policy directed towards Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders over the last three decades, reveals that “history” is everywhere. Competing versions of history inform different understandings of how one should respond in the present. Indeed the politics of which version of history is to prevail is central to the political process that frames settler/indigenous relations in Australia. Part of this framing political process is the battle over identities.

Nationalism has been studied extensively this century. Among theorists and historians there is agreement that nations can be distinguished, at least in certain respects, from earlier forms of community. The area of dispute revolves mainly around the question of the relationship between modern nations and the communities that came before them. This is largely a matter of emphasis rather than a clear divide among theorists. It is useful,

¹This is an analytical distinction which in no way seeks to imply the absence of overlapping associations.
however, to signal the two positions towards which theorists have tended to lean.\textsuperscript{2}

The first position emphasises the deep historical roots of nations; the concern with origins is part of a causal explanation for the rise of specific nations, and for the failure of other efforts at nation building. This emphasis upon the \emph{longue durée} of national association has received its most convincing treatment to date in the writings of Anthony D. Smith, with his notion of the ‘ethnic core’ and the ethnic origins of modern nations. Smith does not simply replace the idea of the modernity of nations with the idea of their primordiality; he presents a more sophisticated account of the emergence of nations as modern forms of political community which nevertheless only emerge successfully where they are able to sustain a belief in common historical origins and a feeling of common destiny. Only sentiments of this quality and intensity, deriving from historically surviving \emph{ethne}, he argues, are able to hold together the large civic communities we call nations. Ethnie, or ethnic communities Smith defines as “named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity.”

Nations and the states which typically give form to them are characterised by Smith as “ideological metaphors about large-scale abstractions and constructs,” formed around a number of processes and activities including “economic development, communications, urbanization, linguistic standardization, [and] administration. . .”\textsuperscript{3}

Nevertheless, Smith argues, nations continue to draw upon the sociocultural model for human organisation, communication and community that has characterised ethnicity since its first recorded instances around 3000 BC. Smith emphasises the importance of historically rooted “myths and memories,” including ethnic connection with a geographical homeland, for the emergence of nations. Though there was more to a nation than these, they nevertheless formed a \emph{sine qua non}:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2}John Hutchinson has characterised the debate in a similar way. See his \textit{Modern Nationalism}, 1994, p. xiii.
\end{itemize}
there can be no identity without memory (albeit selective), no collective purpose without myth, and identity and purpose or destiny are necessary elements of the very concept of the nation.\textsuperscript{4}

The second position emphasises the modernity and inventedness of nations, even going so far, at times, as to claim that the nation is a ‘fiction’ created by nationalist leaders, activists, and cultural elites. Nations emerged in the era of nationalism—the eighteenth or nineteenth century, or perhaps even the sixteenth, depending on which theorist you choose—beginning in Europe but spreading out to encompass the whole world by the twentieth century. Writers such as Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson, despite significant differences between their individual approaches, fit loosely into this tendency. It was Gellner who famously wrote:

Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men, as an inherent though long-delayed political destiny, are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates pre-existing cultures: \textit{that} is a reality, for better or worse, and in general an inescapable one.\textsuperscript{5}

Gellner, in direct opposition to writers who stress continuity, wrote with approval of Renan’s insight about the central importance of “forgetting” for nations. “Links with groups predating the emergence of the nation,” Gellner argued, “are rare, tenuous, suspect, irrelevant.”\textsuperscript{6} Some authors who pursue this line of thought argue that because nations and the nation-states which typically give them political form and expression are historical “inventions” emerging at a particular point in history, they are also destined to be replaced by some other form of collective identity. Writers such as Hobsbawm have suggested that the era of nations is drawing to a close, and that national belonging will be replaced by other forms of


\textsuperscript{6}Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism and the two forms of cohesion in complex societies”, 1987, p. 6. See also Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”, 1990.
identity in the era of globalisation. Others, like Elie Kedourie, angrily pit themselves against this “modern invention”, seeing it as largely the product of irresponsible intellectuals during the eighteenth and nineteenth century—the restless generation stirred up by Enlightenment, Romanticism and the Napoleonic years—who began to meddle with the political order, attempting to institute rationalist forms of rule and social life. In nationalist politics and doctrine he sees nothing but the imposition of “arbitrary” philosophical notions dreamt up by intellectuals and philosophers who failed to distinguish between reality and books, upon a real world that is far more messy and resistant to neat programs. Nationalism entailed notions of the virtue of perpetual national diversity (stemming, Kedourie argues, from the writings of Kant), of the ‘naturalness’ of national sovereignty and political boundaries, and the belief that self-determination was one of the highest goods. Kedourie’s critique expresses the voluntarist and inventionist strand of thinking in its most extreme form: nationalism as irrationality, dream (or nightmare), crime, disease, as the loosening of morals and of the bonds of civil society, as imposed upon, rather than an aspect of, social reality.

Definitions of the nation have been equally varied, from those that point to the importance of will and consciousness, to those that emphasise certain institutional criteria. Seton-Watson, for example, emphasised belief in nationhood over the reality of statehood and other more “objective” criteria. “All that I can find to say” he

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8 See Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 1960, ch. 6 and passim.

9 See Anthony D. Smith’s critique of the “invented tradition” concept, and of the volition implied by arguments that assert the nationalist manipulation of the populace by elites, in “The Nation: Invented, Imagined, Reconstructed”, 1993; and “Nationalism and the Historians”, 1996, pp. 175-97.
concluded "is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one." In his view absence of statehood did not necessarily mean absence of nationhood:

A state is a legal and political organisation with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens. A nation is a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness. . . States can exist without a nation, or with several nations, among their subjects; and a nation can be coterminous with the population of one state, or be divided between several states.

For this reason he felt that the claim that the world was divided into nation-states was an exaggeration. Many polities, he argued, did not unify nation and state in the manner implied by the label "nation-state." On the other hand the English social theorist Anthony Giddens deemed the institutional practice and character of the modern state to be so central to nationhood that he incorporated the state into his definition of the nation. In his view a nation only existed in a clearly demarcated territory, as a sovereign collectivity "which is subject to a unitary administration, reflexively monitored both by the internal state apparatus and those of other states." Writers like John Breuilly have produced similar state centred definitions of the nation: the nation is distinguished from ethne by its fundamentally institutional and centralised character.

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10Hugh Seton-Watson, Nations and States, 1977, p. 5. See also pp. 481-2, where Seton-Watson uses the terms “nation” and “national consciousness” interchangeably.

11Seton-Watson, Nations and States. Quote at p. 1. A similar understanding is at work when Eric Hobsbawm refers to “the semantic illusion which today turns all states officially into ‘nations’ (and members of the United Nations), even when they are patently not.” See Nations and Nationalism Since 1780, p. 177.


The debate among the theorists and historians of nationalism is not a central concern of this thesis. However three points need to be made in marking out my own approach to the study of settler-nationalism. The first is that I do not agree with those who consider nationalism a diminishing force in the world, and nor do I believe that the nation-state has had its day, despite the importance of globalising trends. Secondly, I believe that it is helpful to maintain the analytical distinction between state and nation, in order to account for the way that different nations, nations in waiting, or ethnic communities can exist under the umbrella of a state, along a continuum of conflict or conflict-free situations. Thirdly, I pay specific attention to the settler character of Australian nationalism.

**Settler-Nations and Settler-Nationalism**

The nations that emerged as a result of European colonisation have often been referred to in terms of their “newness.” Belief in the nation's newness has been an important legitimating ideology in at least some of those settler colonies which regarded the lands that they invaded as culturally empty and thus fit for cultural transplantation; it compensated for the fear, anxiety or doubt that was aroused by the fact that the prospective nation had no, or an all too brief, history. Before federation Australia’s settler society was imagined as a British product but an Australian nation in the making: a prospective white nation more British than Britain in terms of the composition of its population.¹⁴

The distinction between settler societies and the European nations lies less in the direction of their purported newness, than in

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¹⁴Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, 1981, p. 112. See P.R. Stephenson’s radical nationalist manifesto *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, 1936, for the ideology of the empty land, and the virtue of newness—“to be in a country without any castles or ruins, to be at liberty in a country in which there were thousands of square miles of ground not staled by history and tradition” (p. 33)—and the idea that Australia’s destiny was to take over from a Britain in decline (p. 54). The envy of Britain’s history and traditions is a driving force, despite the protestation of the liberty of newness. It is also evident in the fantasy that Europe was about to go bust, and that Australia, as an isolated fragment, was destined to be the future carrier of the white race and civilisation, pp. 88-9.
the fact of their former or ongoing colonial status. The fact that they emerged historically from colonies of the old empires continues to condition their national existence in the present. Countries like the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, despite enormous differences, are all structured by the fact that they are predominantly settler cultures which have to a large extent supplanted and dispossessed other peoples. The study of nations and nationalisms that arose in what is called the new world must be sensitive to the cultural dilemmas produced by the formation of nations based on dispossession. Whether settler societies counted or discounted indigenous peoples in their national scenarios or myths, the fact of indigenous presence conditions settler forms of nationalism. This influence is not simply rooted in the past, but continues to shape contemporary forms of nationalism. Settler-nationalism, with its particular conditions of emergence and relations with indigenous populations, has had to face specific dilemmas, especially where the memory of conquest is very recent. The indigenous populations were dispossessed of their lands, usually violently. Dispossession did not occur at a single moment, but is a continuous process. As part of this ongoing process and its associated discourses, especially in the late twentieth century, settler-nationalism must deal with increasingly articulate and morally powerful indigenous populations.

In setting out my key category of settler-nationalism I am placing myself within a tradition of theoretical work that seeks to explain the specific nature and impact of settler forms of colonialism and capitalism. In an important comparative work from the 1980s Donald Denoon, for example, sought to explain key features of capitalism as it emerged in the settler societies of Australia, New Zealand and Latin America, as distinct from the colonial economies and social and political life of the non-settler colonies and former colonies. He distinguished settler societies from those that emerged from the European invasion of densely populated regions. In the latter, indigenous populations were usually settled agriculturalists who lived in villages and had societal structures that Europeans recognised. In these situations the indigenous populations were typically more organised and able to defend themselves, which meant that their interests had to be at least partially accommodated, even as their societies were exploited.
materially by the invaders. European colonisers exploited societies like India, China, Java and Japan for labour and material goods, and used them as a market for surplus European goods. The primary aim was thus not to settle European populations, though this was usually an outcome.

Denoon’s second category was settler capitalism. Typically this colonial form emerged in regions that were less densely populated, where populations were nomadic, as in the Cape of South Africa, in North America and Australia. A prominent feature of all these societies was the almost complete displacement of indigenous nomadic societies, primarily through the introduction of commercial agriculture (the beginning of capitalism) and secondarily through military means. “Exceptions could be cited,” he argued, “but in general nomadic people have been lucky to survive the shock of European settlement, whereas the complete annihilation of settled communities has rarely been attempted, and even more rarely accomplished.”

Patrick Wolfe has argued that the most important structural feature of settler-colonialism, regardless of the actual or near annihilation of indigenous populations, is a binary opposition between invader and invaded that drives and organises all social relations concerning settlers and the indigenous, and underpins in a dynamic way emergent forms of settler-nationalism. By scrutinising the historical movements of this binary, Wolfe argues, one can see a basic historical continuity “underlying changing regimes which Australian society has sought to impose upon Aboriginal people.” Because settler colonialism is a system of relations, and not simply an historical originary event, there is a continuity in relations between settlers and indigenous peoples informed by elementary or deep structures. Unlike other forms of the colonial relation, where the colonising agent seeks to exploit the surplus value of indigenous labour, creole or settler colonialism predominantly bypasses the indigene in an attempt to directly connect with the land. Because of this “negative articulation” with the indigenous, mirroring the positive articulation with the land, the cultural logic informing relations is one of eliminating the indigene.

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16Patrick Wolfe, “Nation and MiscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the
The exploitation of convict labour was, in a general sense, sufficient for the emergent settler Australian economy. Once convict transportation stopped, and with the development of manufacturing and other industries, the Australian economy relied primarily on an expanding pool of free immigrant labour, and in certain areas upon indentured labour. The white population, unlike its colonial counterparts in Africa and India, came to vastly outnumber the native population. However, this should not blind us to the continuity with other colonial situations of relations of exploitation which characterised the use of Aboriginal labour from the very earliest phase of settler colonialism, nor its importance to Australia's developing economy. The Aboriginal camps which existed on the fringes of settlements following pastoral and agricultural expansion were important sources of cheap labour for white communities. Pearling, fishing and other coastal enterprises relied heavily upon Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Pacific Islander labour. As in periods such as the goldrushes in Victoria and New South Wales in the 1850s, and in other states later in the nineteenth century, when and where white rural labour became scarce Aborigines played a crucial role in the survival of the pastoral industry.\textsuperscript{17} They formed a “lumpen” pool of reserve labour, as it were. Furthermore, in Australia's north, north-west, western and central regions indigenous peoples played a fundamental role in the development and survival of pastoralism and its associated industries and communities. In New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia, as in the north and west of Australia, Aboriginal labour was an important element of domestic economy, such as child minding and servant work, as well as agricultural and pastoral labouring.\textsuperscript{18}


\textsuperscript{17}Heather Goodall, Invasion to Embassy, 1996; Richard Broome, Aboriginal Australians, 1982, p. 71 & “Aboriginal Workers on South-Eastern frontiers”, 1994. For Queensland and the effect of the goldrushes of the 1860s and 1870s on Aboriginal labour, see Rosalind Kidd, The Way We Civilise, 1997, pp. 23-4.

\textsuperscript{18}For a general overview, see Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore, “Working for the White People: an Historiographic Essay on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labour”, and other essays contained in Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders with Jackie Huggins (eds.), Aboriginal Workers, a special issue of
Nevertheless, as the category settler-colonialism suggests, from the beginning the fundamental resource involved in the colonial enterprise was the land, and not indigenous labour or other goods. As the historian of Australian radicalism Robin Gollan argued, the issue that dominated nineteenth century politics was the question of land: how it was to be carved up between settlers, and accordingly, what form of society the organisation of land as a resource was going to produce. The battle was between the land barons and the lower classes. The squatters and pastoralists envisaged a hierarchical class society with limited democracy and a well developed aristocracy. The lower classes of convicts, ex-convicts and poorer immigrants saw in the ownership of smaller plots of land the means of an independent social and economic life, and the basis for the development of an egalitarian, democratic society beyond anything they experienced or could hope to achieve in Britain. The indigenous peoples were excluded from the equation.\(^\text{19}\) Albert Memmi argued in his famous analysis of colonialism that the basis of solidarity among colonisers of vastly unequal positions of status, wealth and power rested upon their exploitative relationship with the colonised. The same was true in Australia, where colonial privilege depended upon the wholesale refusal to recognize the rights of Aborigines to land. In this way land could become a resource for colonial authorities to bestow on settlers at prices which would help to fund the colonial enterprise, but cheap enough to make settlement in the colonies a lucrative incentive for immigration. The promise of the colonies was that all colonisers could build up a higher level of privilege relative to what they might ever hope to achieve in the British Isles.\(^\text{20}\)

With the pastoral expansion from the 1820s onward the desire to rid the land of the indigenous presence intensified; the rapidly expanding rural economy, feeding Britain’s industrial revolution with wool products, required the expropriation of vast tracts of Aboriginal land. Aborigines needed to be ‘cleared’ from these lands.


\(^{20}\) Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 1990, especially the section ‘Does the Colonial Exist?’, pp. 70-84.
This structuring of relations and desire profoundly shaped the emergent Australian settler nation.

**National Homeland, National Space**

From the very beginning the European engagement with Australian space contained important assumptions about Aboriginality. While admitting that scattered Aboriginal groups could be met with wandering over the territory, early settlers argued that these people did not possess the land. In their view Aborigines did not have sufficiently developed social arrangements to warrant concepts of land ownership. By claiming that Aborigines had no proprietary interest in the land, white colonisers were claiming that only they had real ownership of the land, and were the first to take real possession of it. Thus their emergent link with and attachment to the land was—in their own eyes—*originary*. The Aboriginal attachment was deemed transient or “light.” The land had not been worked over, therefore it had not been possessed, until Europeans began to make it “productive.” The European connection with the land, though relatively new, was full of the promise Aborigines (in the eyes of European settlers) had never been able to make good.

This central legitimising idea for colonisation, based on the perception of the structureless nature of Aboriginal life, had a profound impact on the way that colonisers perceived the continent, and in the shape that national consciousness later took. The fiction that Australia was *terra nullius* underpinned the belief that the British had the legitimate right to settle it, without reaching treaty agreements with the indigenous peoples. This foundation myth—together with the myth that Aborigines were a dying race—meant that when the nation was eventually envisaged, from about the second half of the nineteenth century, it seemed that nothing stood in the way of a completely British nation being created in the whole of the continent—what the federalist and later Prime Minister Edmund Barton termed “a nation for a continent and a continent for a nation.”

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respect was the extent to which it was perceived as an absence in cultural and societal terms.\textsuperscript{22}

Such a notion of the non-relationship of the indigenous with Australian space—since relationship was construed in strict Lockeian terms of possession\textsuperscript{23}—has shaped settler-nationalist understandings of their own relationship to land right up to the present. The settler nation spread itself out, in an imaginative and physical sense, to take possession of the whole continent, as well as nearby coastal islands. This sense of ownership required the filling out of the 'empty' space of the continent with settler, and eventually settler-national meaning. Thus, once settlers began to think of their community as a nation, even those vast areas deemed uninhabitable by the white man were imaginatively appropriated as important domains of the national homeland. The fact that they were physically empty of white inhabitants did not mean that they were not appropriated. Others—i.e. non-white "aliens"—still needed to be kept out of these areas because of the way that national boundaries were constructed.\textsuperscript{24}

National consciousness involves the feeling of being at home in a particular land, and of making historical connection with that land. Through literature and art, through letters and other ephemera one can gain a sense of the growing identification of British settlers with

\textsuperscript{22}W.G. McMinn, \textit{Nationalism and Federalism in Australia}, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{23}See John Locke, \textit{Two Treatises of Government}, 1960, pp. 327-44 (The Second Treatise on Government, Ch. V, "Of Property").
\textsuperscript{24}The Northern Territory, for example, though undeveloped was not to be given up to those who might develop it, for the whole continent was to be the white man's land. The Australian Natives Association (ANA) strenuously opposed a plan, suggested in 1891 by the Governor of South Australia, to develop the Territory with the aid of indentured Asian labor, arguing for "one continental Australia for the white man." See John E Menadue, "The Historical Impact of the Australian Natives' Association", 1971, pp. 504-7. Administrators from the early twentieth century were concerned with developing this part of Australia before somebody else tried to, or coveted it. They argued for the viability of white occupation, against some of the scientific opinion of the day which claimed that white people could not prosper in the tropics. See Northern Territory Reports, especially for the years in the 1920s.
their adopted land. Such feelings were largely and for a long time inchoate, but represented a gradual accommodation to a landscape and climate that was initially perceived as both hostile and dreary in comparison with the lushness of Britain. The shift to a view of Australia as a health-giving environment of sunshine and space, in comparison with the closed in and dark British landscape, was an important shift toward the development of an Australian national ethos.  

25 The myth of the struggle with the land was central to the creation of the national mystique in its early phases.  

26 Flood, fire, and drought, the hostile landscape, were seen to shape a distinctive Australian character. The pioneer myth, which emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, was a later development of this older theme. The hardy white Australian bushman staking out his patch of ground, matching his skills with his opponent the land, became an important figure in literature. The virtues of such pioneering men (and occasionally women) were extolled by writers such as Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson and Joseph Furphy. This myth was important in a number of ways. It provided folk heroes as ordinary men; all Australian nationals could thus seek to emulate the pioneers' attributes. Perhaps more importantly it provided one myth of legitimate ownership of the land, since so much suffering, courage and hard work had been required in "opening up" the continent and in making it "productive."  

27 It was also part of that

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25 On this view of Australia as health giving, see Richard White, Inventing Australia, ch. 3.


27 For a discussion of the pioneer legend and its importance as a nationalist myth, see J.B. Hirst, “The Pioneer Legend,” 1992. He posits this as a competing and complementary myth to the more radical, egalitarian and collectivist legend of the nomad tribe of pastoral workers, as discussed by Russel Ward in The Australian Legend, 1966. The pioneer myth is often conspicuously silent on the struggle with humanity for the appropriation of the land. The battles with Aborigines and the eventual victory over them are not celebrated as moments of national birth, though occasionally in literature the defeat of the Aborigine is celebrated as victory. Hirst cites a poem from the Fifth Grade Victorian School Reader, in use in the first half of this century. “Pioneers”, by Frank Hudson, has the lines “We wrought with a will unceasing,/We moulded, and fashioned, and planned,/And we fought the black, and we
process of dispossession which, from its earliest colonial phases, involved the filling out of space with new meanings. In fact, as Paul Carter has argued, such symbolic appropriation of space was an integral feature of colonisation. According to his argument, developed initially in his book *The Road to Botany Bay*, and in subsequent works, the colonisers took imaginary possession of the land by filling it with their own meanings and symbolism, including the naming of places, flora and fauna, and the transformation of settled environments—the marking of the landscape with European imaginative frameworks. Through discrete acts of naming the white explorers mapped out a country as much in their own minds as in the charts that they drew up. This imaginative mapping and naming was a central aspect of the act of colonisation. It filled, or rather formed, the new space in which the colonisers were to live, with a combination of old and new names, most deriving from England, and many a result of the whims and accidents of experience of the explorers and surveyors who set out to “discover” the country. Of course in these journeys of discovery the original discoverers and namers of the land—the Aborigines—played an integral role, whether through actually guiding the parties through the land, or by virtue of the explorers making use of Aboriginal travel lines. Perhaps it should not be surprising, given the cultural arrogance of the imperial quest, that such facts did not get in the way of claiming first discovery and possession through naming of that which was already known and named.\(^{28}\) In fact, the canceling out of the Aboriginal relationship to the land was central to the colonial project:

For the struggle for a name is also a struggle for power. In this sense the naming of places underlines the point that successful colonisation depends not only on the physical exclusion of a former people, but on the suppression of their sounds, the successful reduction of their voices to a background chorus that might be (and frequently was) mistaken for frogs and crickets.\(^{29}\)


The published narratives of the explorers were important acts of colonisation. The curious thing about them, Carter points out, is the way that they, with few exceptions, erase Aboriginality from the landscape. Where the indigenous do intrude, they appear as “motiveless as the ‘natural productions’ of the country.” The explorers repressed the indigenous presence through cultivating an attitude of “studied indifference,” and moved through the land as if they were the first to see it and deduce meaning from it.\textsuperscript{30}

Explorers and surveyors played an important role in mapping out the national terrain. The mapping of territory was itself important for the development of nationalism, since it filled out the dimensions of what was later to become national space. But their role was also important mythically. Their failings, just as much as their successful explorations, were used later as powerful narratives explaining the nature of the national quest, and of the development of the Australian mystique. Those who died or disappeared, like Burke and Wills, or Ludwig Leichhardt, became heroes whose blood fused with the soil, through their acts of suffering and sacrifice.\textsuperscript{31} In the absence of celebrated defensive battles on Australian soil, such

\textsuperscript{30}Paul Carter, \textit{Living in a New Country}, p. 11. Here Carter echoes Frantz Fanon, who argued that, in colonisation, the colonisers do not take stock of the colonised as men and women, but treat them as part of the natural landscape, i.e. “as the \textit{natural} background to the human presence” of the colonisers, so that taming nature means taming the native, \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, 1967, p. 201.

\textsuperscript{31}See Manning Clark, “Heroes,” 1985. Clark points out, however, that towards the end of the nineteenth century radical nationalists in search of national heroes found the early explorers wanting, primarily because they were not democratic enough, or took on the airs of English gentlemen. The new democratic national hero was the worker in the outback, and for some even the bushrangers, pp. 63-64. For an extensive argument about the explorers see Simon Ryan’s \textit{The Cartographic Eye}, 1996. In disputing Hodge and Mishra’s claim, in \textit{Dark Side of the Dream}, that the impact of the explorer on the popular imagination had been slight, he points to widespread dissemination of explorer myths in school texts, popular history and fiction, forming “a touchstone in the constant construction and reconstruction of Australia’s national identity” (pp. 12-13). We might add “high culture” literature, music and art to the list.
explorer deaths, together with children lost in the bush, and other
deaths in landscape, served the purpose of sacralising the national
landscape.

The pioneering legend, and the national myth of the hero-
explorers, persist as important elements of national consciousness.
However these national myths have been destabilised in the post
1960s phase of intensified interest in and focus upon aspects of the
dispossession and ill-treatment of Aborigines. This increased focus
and the concomitant rise in status of the indigenous past, and in
revivified indigenous cultures, has had other results. John Barnes
has argued that the new prominence of all things Aboriginal at the
level of public consciousness has had important consequences. “As
more and more of the Aboriginal past is recovered—the restoration
of Aboriginal names, for example,” he argues “the white relationship
to the land is subtly challenged at an emotional and psychological
level.”

Such a challenge has a direct impact on settler-nationalism. Anthony Smith highlighted the importance for ethnic groups and
nations of the idea of a place of mythic origin. Such lands or areas
where the ethnic group fades back into a mysterious “time
immemorial” are awe and fear inspiring, and are infused with
sacredness. Sometimes these places of ancestral origin exist in
territories no longer occupied by the ethnic group, but this does not
diminish their mythical significance. “Zones of origin” might also
exist within currently held territory, and these will have particular
significance in the ethnic or national mythic repertoire.

In this respect the situation is complex for settler Australians.
As the Australian novelist Martin Boyd has written:

It is perhaps one of our disabilities that our age-long secretions
did not begin in our own country, like those of old civilisations.
Their remote ancestors saw their gods in clouds and heard

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32 John Barnes, “Legend,” p. 55. In the same essay Barnes discusses the
“spiritual lack” of the non-indigenous in relation to the land, pp. 52-56.
Andrew Lattas, in an analysis of popular and artistic images and discourses,
has shown the prevalence of this cultural perception. See especially
them in the winds, and placed them on the mountains of the countries in which they still live. We have no indigenous myths. Persephone was not snatched into the underworld from the Blue Mountains, and no Jovian thunderbolts ever fell from Donna Buang.34

The cultural importance of this should not be underestimated. Does the immemorial past of the settler nation reside in those places from which the imagined community originally came? Obviously the ethnic lands of origin of settlers are elsewhere, and yet the nation as an abstract community of belonging has mythic zones of origin within the Australian continent. The “outback” for example is a mythic space of origin for the settler-Australian national, rooted in the historical development of Australia on the basis of pastoralism and mining. However, to the extent that these zones exist for settler Australia, they must compete with much older, and more convincingly historical, associations of Aborigines with land. In fact, Aboriginal Australia fits the bill of the “natural” Australian ethnic group or nation far more convincingly, in Anthony Smith’s terms, than does the settler nation; a problem settler-nationalists have had to deal with at least since the 1930s, and with intensified effort since the 1960s. Thus the claims of settler Australians for their spiritual connection in the face of this reality frequently take on a manic defensive quality, because the settler nation cannot drift back through time immemorial within Australia, while Aboriginal communities can.35 To the extent that indigenous peoples distinguish themselves as a community or communities from the settler nation, their connection with the land—a powerful competing claim—becomes a problem and a source of tension for settler-nationalists. The competing claims of connection to land from indigenous peoples can be fear arousing; the other side of not truly

34Martin Boyd, “Their link with Britain,” 1993, pp. 199-200.
35The potency of this dilemma is revealed in the common settler nationalist claim that, because the indigenous once came to Australia, we are all in effect immigrants on the Australian continent. The fact that the Aboriginal migration keeps getting pushed back by archaeological finds and speculation—currently it is between forty and one hundred thousand years—does not seem to affect this strategy.
belonging is the fear of being expelled, of entering the category of the dispossessed.\textsuperscript{36} The Aboriginal claim of special connection with land bites home at a point of fragile, tenuous connection—a sense of belonging built up over two centuries. Even before the 1992 Mabo ruling, the gradual and emerging consensus at the political level on at least limited notions of Aboriginal land rights, and the discourse of Aboriginal spiritual connection with their lands, represented a subtle questioning of settler relationships to land, suggesting that such connections were superficial by comparison. In the aftermath of the Mabo ruling, this has been brought home in a legal, economic and cultural sense. This potential dilemma has been there for settlers from the beginning; the ideological function served by the creation of national space has been to enact ‘legitimate’ possession through knowledge and sacrifice with the land. Aboriginal knowledge of the land, its flora and fauna, and its spiritual meaning, has always been a source of potential illegitimacy for the settler claims on land.\textsuperscript{37}

\textbf{Aborigines as the Settler Nation’s Strangers}

In the early phases of colonisation Australia’s indigenous peoples were for the most part excluded from the moral community of settlers. This is not to say that settlers were not morally involved with the indigenous. The moral claim of the indigenous on settler society has a long but chequered history, which predated the formation of the Australian nation-state. A convincing argument can be made that from the beginning of European colonisation the perception of Aboriginality and Aboriginal society was embroiled in the moral life of Europeans.\textsuperscript{38} This moral involvement of settlers

\textsuperscript{36}Pauline Hanson in her maiden speech to parliament expressed this fear:

\begin{quote}
This nation is being divided into black and white, and the present system encourages this. I am fed up with being told, ‘This is our land.’ Well, where the hell do I go? I was born here, and so were my parents and children.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{38}The best accounts of such moral involvement have so far emerged in literary and cultural studies. See especially the work on Australian literature
with the indigenous was not simply a function of whether the
indigenous were deemed to belong to the society or nation being
established on Australian soil, but such imagined belongings were
nevertheless an important feature of settler/indigenous relations.

Insofar as the indigenous were seen as belonging to the human
race they had certain rights recognised by the British, even if, as
was frequently the case, these were flouted in reality. From
Governor Phillip’s initial instruction to treat the natives with amity
and kindness, through the periods of gradual invasion, massacre,
icarceration or “protection,” assimilation, integration, and self-
determination or self-management, we can find instances of
recognition of Aborigines’ moral claim on their usurpers, in the
utterances and writings of historians, missionaries, humanitarian
societies, and in the tempered response sometimes found in
Government reports. This might appear in the form of lament, or as
a warning about future guilt in the eyes of the world of a society or
nation built on the extermination of a people.

But there was a stronger sense in which the demarcations of
social space carved up the moral sphere. To exist outside the
usurping society, or worse still to clash with it as it imposed its own
mode of production, was to become morally invisible to the bulk of
the settler community. Moreover, the development of racism in the
nineteenth century made it possible for some settlers to deny
Aborigines a human status, or to relegate them to a subhuman
status. Aborigines were thus aliens who stood outside the settler
nation, even while occupying the same national space.

and the way that Aboriginality has been engaged with there, in J.J. Healy,
*Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, 1989; T. Goldie, *Fear and
approaches using film, see G. Turner, *National Fictions*, 1986; Annette
Hamilton, “Fear and Desire: Aborigines, Asians and the Social Imaginary”,
1990. Henry Reynolds has recently published a history of Australian settlers
who fought for the rights of the Aborigines, *This Whispering in Our Hearts*,
1998.

39Governor Phillip’s Instructions, 25 April 1787, *Historical Records of
However, Aborigines were at the same time, and increasingly as time wore on, unsettling *strangers* for white identities and for settler-nationalism. This refers back to that moral ambiguity with which settlers were faced when dealing with Aborigines. They were not simply aliens like all other non-whites. Their land had been taken; they still voiced claims to it, even if those claims were ignored. Even where white Australians neglected to speak of the indigenous in articulations of their national identity, because the indigenous lived in and had claims to the same national space, their character, their rights and claims were inevitably implicated in the understanding of white identity.

The concept of Aborigines as *strangers* is inspired by the work of the European social theorist Zygmunt Bauman, and depends upon an important distinction between alienness and strangeness. Aliens are, in a sense, understandable—in encounters with them my identity is preserved, even re-inforced. Strangers are far more disturbing. In his early published work—*Culture as Praxis* (1973)—Bauman explored the ways that cultures and societies dealt with *in-between* phenomena: things that upset the neat divisions of cultural systems; things that were neither solid nor liquid; things that broached the divide between inside and outside; the unclassifiable. This was because classification—and thought—depended upon oppositions and distinctions, not gradations between categories. Not all such in-between things were of equal importance across cultures, but all cultures found some important. Those individuals and peoples deemed to straddle the boundary between me and not-me, between inside and outside of society, for example, existed for all cultures, and could inspire dread because of the way that they seemed to question the very substance of cultural boundaries and all other *necessary* certainties of social life.⁴⁰

In building up his portrait of the “stranger” (the marginal man) Bauman drew upon a variety of rich and evocative sources. These included the notion of viscousness or stickiness as inherently repulsive, as explained so vividly by Jean-Paul Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*; the sociology of the ‘stranger’ of the early sociologists Robert Michels and Georg Simmel (the stranger as neither friend nor enemy, was fear arousing, a threat to sociality because we could

not fully know him or her); the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz’s concept of the stranger as a threat to coherence, order and commonly held assumptions about identities, world views, reality and so on; and the work of anthropologists like Edmund Leach, Evans-Pritchard and Mary Douglas on the cultural production of anomalies, ambiguity, pollution and dirt (the latter as “things out of place”), which disturbed—and which were produced through the operation of—classificatory systems, building up to entire societal orders.41

I want to distinguish in an important sense the way that settlers perceived Australian Aborigines as against other non-whites who did not belong in the new white Australian nation; in other words, Aborigines were “strangers” for settler-nationalism, whereas other non-whites were less troubling because they were more clearly aliens, the opposite and clearly defined pole to “us.” Though lumped together with “aboriginal natives” of other countries and regions for certain legislative purposes, Australian Aborigines have always presented a very specific dilemma for settler national consciousness, and for a transplanted culture seeking to establish itself as the rightful owner of the land. Because they were dispossessed, the nature and reason for their dispossession needed to be accounted for. Settler colonial and nationalist ideology supplied reasons and justifications—the most central being the myth of *terra nullius*—which, while never free of ambiguity and doubt, proved satisfactory enough for many settlers. Moreover, the very powerful and pervasive myth that the Aboriginal race was somehow mysteriously dying out, for a long time directed the attention of settler-nationalists away from the issue of Aboriginality. But the Aborigine had the capacity to disturb white settlers profoundly, especially insofar as they were concerned with the articulation of their human relationship with the Australian lands, and thus in relation to their developing consciousness of themselves as Australians. This is often difficult to see, especially since towards the end of the nineteenth century the Aborigine seemed to drop out of view. J.J. Healy in his excellent study of the relationship between Australian settler literature and Aboriginality,

argued that Aborigines were very much at the surface in nineteenth century literature, but tended to recede into the background in the early twentieth century. But in studying the literature of the nineteenth century he was struck by how profoundly the white settlers sense of themselves and of what they were doing in Australia was bound up with the indigenous presence. The great fictional uneases of the nineteenth century, he argued, enabled one to glimpse how profoundly the contact with the Aborigine affected the white settler, going right to the core of his or her being:

I began to see an Aboriginal subject that cut right into the centre of their doubts, fears, hopes, traumas; a penetration so massively reflected upon that their fictions became narrative battlegrounds in which conscience fought itself to a kind of consciousness. I was struck by how often a consciousness of who they themselves were became tied into the quality of their contact with the Aborigines.\(^{42}\)

The reason why many theorists of Australian nationalism tend to overlook the importance of Aboriginality for the nationalism immediately preceding and following federation is that Aboriginality was less explicitly talked about, in comparison with the emphasis on the Chinese threat to a sustainable Australian identity. Healy argued, in relation to literature, that “an Aboriginal presence which had haunted the nineteenth century had receded from the consciousness of urban Australia in the early years of federation” and that, as a society, “the new nation constructed its own myths, its own ideological sense of itself” largely excluding any reference to Aboriginality.\(^{43}\) This did not mean, however, that


\(^{43}\) J. J. Healy, *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia*, pp. xvi-xvii. Luke Trainor argues a similar case for Australian history writing. Before the 1870s history writing could not ignore the struggle with the Aborigines for land, but in the history writing from the late 1870s, emanating especially out of Melbourne, histories presented Aborigines in contemptuous terms or simply erased them from the record. Social Darwinism, and especially the myth of the dying race, was by this time beginning to exert a powerful influence directing historical attention away from the Aborigines. One conservative, noticeably non-nationalistic, historian was more sympathetic toward the
Aboriginality was not still a potent force operating underneath the surface; moreover at certain periods, like the 1930s and the 1960s, and increasingly from the latter decade, Aboriginality came massively to the fore in overt discussions of national identity.

Hodge and Mishra, in their book *Dark Side of the Dream*, have argued that the very name Aboriginality—"from the origins"—suggests an ultimate legitimacy of Aboriginal claims on the land in the face of which white settler claims pale. Aboriginals thus represented a powerful and continuing threat to the settler nation's legitimacy.\(^4^4\) There is a certain truth in this argument, though Hodge and Mishra tend to push it too far. For many settlers the ideologies of race and ownership were enough to legitimise the connection between settler nation and land. What one can argue with more conviction is that Aboriginality and Aboriginal claims always represent a potential threat to settler-nationalism. The mode of otherness of Aboriginality—tied as it is to prior occupation of the land—is a specific mode of alterity that has the capacity to disturb settler national identity in a profound way. It is a form of strangeness for settlers that threatens to turn the notion of the alien against the settler self, pointing out that the settler is in fact foreign: a stranger in the land he or she calls home because un-Aboriginal.\(^4^5\)

Jeremy Beckett has emphasised the complex implications of this situation for both the indigenous and the non-indigenous:

> [A]s tiny minorities that are politically and economically dependent, they [the indigenous] have no prospect of sovereignty. Their nationhood seems doomed to remain encapsulated within a nation-state that is not only differently constituted, but that sometimes seeks to appropriate the symbols of their aboriginality. What cannot be appropriated, however, is their descent from the original inhabitants of the

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\(^{44}\)See Hodge and Mishra, *Dark Side of the Dream*, pp. 25-6.

\(^{45}\)Terry Goldie has discussed this in a work dealing with the place of the indigene in the settler literatures of Australia, New Zealand and Canada. See *Fear and Temptation*, p. 12.
country, which thus constitutes a problem for the nationalism of the settler society.⁴⁶

**Nationness and the Other**

The sense of nationness, to paraphrase Benedict Anderson, is an *imagined* reality.⁴⁷ This is not to say, however, that it is a purely contingent invention. Nationness, as a feeling, as consciousness, is firmly rooted in the historical conditions and the social relations from which it emerges. It is my argument in this thesis that within Australia there developed over the period between the 1830s and the end of the Second World War a feeling of nationness among settlers that derived from a sense of common British origins. Within settler Australia the sense of imagined community, at different times based on a myth of common racial, cultural or historical origins, was an important element in shaping the thought and feeling of the majority people, in relation to those designated Other. Nationness is very much about creating boundaries. As Anderson argues the nation is imagined as both limited and sovereign: it never includes everyone, never humanity as a whole. The nature of the boundaries delineating national belonging are transformed over time, but boundaries as such remain integral to nationalism. For a long period of Australia’s European history a sense of Australian nationness based on blood or ethnic ties provided both part of the impetus and the support for those important exclusions from the imagined community of the nation: non-whites from outside the geographic boundaries of the state, and Aborigines from within. The case of Australia is an interesting example of the attempt by an emergent state to build an ethnically homogenous nation. An ethnic principle of solidarity was pursued, not only for its own sake, but in the service of the civic principles of equal citizenship. This process of nation building has left an historical legacy. Historically post-1788 Australia was settled almost exclusively by different national and class groupings from the British Isles. One should not ignore the existence of ethnic differences between transplanted English, Irish

and Scots, yet one should not overplay them either. Removed from Europe to the other side of the world, these differences became less important than the developing sense of commonality and unity based around notions of white ethnicity. This imagined community of “white ethnics,” as I will argue in chapter 2, was strengthened from two sides. The closeness to Asia was predominantly experienced in terms of threat: the Asian hordes descending to take over the white man’s paradise, the white “race” being polluted by diseased and perverse Orientals, the white worker’s work and pay conditions being undermined by Asians who worked too hard for too little money. Indigenous peoples were experienced as a direct threat to the attempt to found and consolidate new settlements, and resented for their presence.

With the growth of national consciousness the majority people, deriving mainly from the British Isles, came to equate their own identity, their sense of imagined community, with the identity of the emergent state. The state was seen as the exclusive representative of white settlers, and was used to deliberately develop a white British nation, seen by its members as one of the healthiest and most progressive in the world. The development of the Australian nation-state as a socially engineered ethnic nation drew an attention to ethnic and other forms of communal difference which was to have a profound impact on the lives of the indigenous, who were kept out of the nation, but really had nowhere else to go. As I argue in chapter 3, even when through absorption and assimilation policies Governments moved to include the indigenous, the basis of that inclusion was the negation of Aboriginality. The fact that they were excluded for so long from citizenship and its privileges tells us a lot about the development of notions of citizenship in Australia, and how these developed within the context

48 On ethnic differences, especially between the majority English and the minority Irish, and different ethnic contributions to the development of Australian nationalism, see Patrick O’Farrell, *The Irish in Australia*, 1993, passim. O’Farrell nevertheless points out that in the harsh Australian conditions and climate, and especially in reaction to and struggle with the Aborigines, the English and the Irish were involved in a relatively non-violent, and ultimately productive, family quarrel rather than a violent and destructive ethnic conflict, pp. 11-12.
of ethnic nationalism. The breakdown of this form of nationalism in Australia in the mid to late twentieth century, and the attempt to replace it with a form of civic nationalism, has had as one of its results the ‘bringing in’ of the indigenous after their long period of alienation. The fact that this could be done draws attention to the importance for Australian settler-nationalism of the presence of civic principles which, once decoupled from the ethnic principle, could be expanded to incorporate a diverse range of ethnic and indigenous groups. It is this terrain and the dilemmas thrown up by the shift from one dominant form of nationalism to another which is explored in the second part of this thesis.

After the Second World War the connection between an imagined white nation and the state began to unravel, and the ideology of an ethnically pure Australian nation came under increasing attack, due to a number of interrelated phenomena. Racial categories fell into disrepute with the revelations of Nazi atrocities; a series of United Nations sponsored studies and publications by eminent scientists in the late 1940s argued that race as a biological category was meaningless. For various reasons including the need for reconstruction after the Second World War and, perhaps more importantly, the developing belief, invigorated by the big scare of Japanese invasion only just thwarted, that a nation could only survive and defend itself in Australia if it rapidly increased its population—the popular slogan of “populate or perish” captures it well—Australian Governments embarked on a programme of immigration which would change the “Anglo-Celtic” nation into a multi-ethnic society. The transformation of the country’s ethnic mix from one that was overwhelmingly white British, to one which included increasingly significant European and Asian minorities, made the majority white ethnic group’s claim to an equivalence between its culture and the national culture increasingly difficult to sustain. New claims emerged for cultural acceptance of difference and there was a push towards a form of civic belonging based on citizenship no longer derived from notions of ethnic kinship. Important shifts in international relations,

50 Alasdair Davidson gives an account of this shift, though as he shows, the
including the emergence of new international laws and treaties, and the phase of decolonisation worldwide since 1947, have made their contribution, especially in terms of the rise to consciousness of the plight of Australia's indigenous peoples. At the political level the compromise has been a commitment to a vague notion of a multicultural society, which could accommodate within the nation-state the needs and desires of the different ethnic groups making up the settler population, as well as indigenous peoples. At a more abstract level, in both intellectual and cultural terms the previously dominant colonial paradigm, which had supported the cultural assertions of European imperialism, has entered a phase of terminal decline. To paraphrase Jean-François Lyotard, the grand narrative of evolutionary progress, the discourse of emancipation through enlightenment, which supported the colonisation of territories previously occupied by 'savages,' is no longer held with conviction in western societies. The breakdown of old certainties raises a plethora of new questions which have a profound economic, political and sociocultural impact. It also results in a number of healthy and less healthy responses.

Since the 1960s several prominent Australian historians, including C.D. Rowley and Henry Reynolds, have highlighted the disaster of white occupation for the Aborigines. They wrote partly in response to an earlier more triumphalist view of Australian history, that emphasised the emergence of a dynamic, socially progressive society, bringing civilisation to the wilderness. This new emphasis on the Aboriginal side of that history has not been without its critics. Nevertheless, it has achieved a level of social prominence, as can be seen in the countless instances of defensiveness, even resentment, of settler Australians, on display in the letters pages of newspapers, and in social commentary by

new vision is an horizon rather than an accomplishment. See his recent From Subject To Citizen: Australian Citizenship in the Twentieth Century, 1997, ch. 2.


historians, journalists and political figures. Of equal importance in terms of highlighting the less savoury aspects of Australian history and society have been a series of Aboriginal protests which shook the national complacency over the plight of Aborigines. The Wave Hill station walkoff staged by the Gurindji people from August 1966, brought to national attention firstly the discriminatory wages and conditions experienced by Aboriginal people in the cattle industry, and secondly the more disturbing question of Aboriginal land rights, as the Gurindji people made clear the broad nature of their demands in 1967 with a petition to the Governor General, seeking land which incorporated part of Wave Hill station, on the basis of 'traditional rights' as well as the need for pastoral and mining enterprises for Aborigines.\(^{53}\) As the call for land rights gained momentum, and Aborigines realised that a conservative government would not respond to their claims, Aboriginal activists created the Aboriginal tent embassy in 1972, drawing international attention. Since then, the issue of land rights has remained on the political stage. After the Fraser government passed the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act in December 1976 some state governments followed with their own land rights and similar acts. The Bicentennial placed Australia's initial act of dispossession in national focus, and important national inquiries into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and more recently, into policies which resulted in child abduction, \textit{(Bringing them Home)}, have been the source of national debate and hand-wringing, amid calls for political action including constitutional change, national apologies, compensation, and new policy initiatives.

As a result of these events and actions a new and more threatening rights issue has emerged around Settler/Aboriginal relations. Corresponding to the demise of Assimilationist and Integrationist policies, there has been an increased emphasis on the separate identity of Aborigines, captured politically in policy shifts towards notions of Aboriginal self-determination and self-government. The emergent Aboriginal leadership, and the work of Aboriginal writers, has contributed greatly to this assertion. A new cultural confidence, something of an Aboriginal renaissance has occurred in a short period of time. But the assertion of separate

identity, and separate rights, presents the state that sees itself as a
country-state with a dilemma, and implicitly or explicitly questions
the extent of the nation-state's legitimacy and authority. In an
influential essay Sally Weaver has highlighted the difficulties
encountered by public figures when trying to formulate public
policy in the face of new ways of thinking about identities and
rights in Australia. How, she asks, do governments and their
agencies, which have functioned according to an ideology of
individual rights within liberal democracies, cope when demands
are made in collective form by Aboriginal groups? More specifically
how does a culture which espouses liberal equality respond to the
claim to special rights of a people due to their prior occupation and
ownership of a common land?54

What I am aiming to produce in this thesis is not a history of
colonialism but a study which attempts to illuminate the
contemporary situation, as legacy of that history and of the
breakdown of colonial certainties,55 from one particular angle. I am
interested in the ideological strategies used by settler Australians in
their attempt to either newly incorporate, or continue to exclude,

54 See Sally M. Weaver, “Struggles of the Nation-State to Define Aboriginality:
Canada and Australia,” 1987. An interesting approach to this question can be
found in Hugh Collins’ argument about the Benthamite influence in
Australian politics and culture. He argues that Utilitarianism is a dominant
political ideology at the base of the formation of the Australian state and its
institutions. The notion of ‘natural rights’ is anathema to the Benthamite
tradition, but even more incomprehensible is the notion of compensatory
rights, i.e. of rights granted as a result of past injustice. Hugh Collins,
“Political Ideology in Australia: The Distinctiveness of a Benthamite Society”,
1985. He notes however that, at the time of writing (mid 1980s), Aboriginal
land rights claims were gaining an international audience which was not
constrained by the “inherited constraints of utilitarian liberalism,” and that
land rights proponents have appealed to international conventions that have
their roots in natural rights doctrines.

55 The question of the actual strength of those historical certainties, and the
forms of alternative discourses that were already disturbing in high
colonialism, have been addressed by postcolonialist theorists such as Homi
Bhabha. See for example his essay “Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of
colonial discourse”, 1994.
Aborigines from the imagined community of the nation. In an important sense the whole history of the colonial relationship between the conquering settlers and the indigenous can be read as an interplay between tendencies towards inclusive and exclusive attitudes, practices and policies in reference to Aborigines. Thus there were in each colony and state, and after 1901 at the federal level, phases of exclusivism and inclusivism. Even within the historical moment of such phases there was always a complex interplay of inclusivist and exclusivist tendencies. For example, while Governments might have moved towards attempts to include Aborigines, this did not always reflect general public or local attitude or action. Often those settlers “on the ground” would act directly to thwart Government intentions. The nineteenth century attempts of missionaries and Government Protectors to ‘civilise’ Aborigines with a view to their later assimilation or absorption into settler society as workers and servants in Victoria and New South Wales met with sometimes extreme local resistance. Similarly, in the mid twentieth century efforts to assimilate Aborigines through housing policies which placed Aboriginal families in the middle of white suburbs in rural towns met intense hostility and anger from white community groups in NSW and Victoria. The ideological split along the inclusivism/exclusivism axis often gained historical expression as a division between urban centres and rural locale. As Barry Morris showed for NSW, local communities often blocked more inclusivist policies which they saw as emanating from city centres safe from “the Aboriginal menace.” Local councils and associations resisted moves such as integrated access to public spaces like swimming pools, cinemas, schools, and housing areas. The reason for resistance was not primarily economic—i.e. perceptions about property values with housing schemes—but because integration involved threats to local white identities, and importantly to the caste barriers which gave a sense of superiority to local whites.56 Different administrative Departments could operate with exclusivist logics quite at odds with the aims of, for example, departments of Aboriginal Affairs. In the NSW of the 1940s when the Aboriginal Protection Board was advocating a policy of assimilation, other departments were acting to exclude

Aborigines, an important example being the exclusion of Aborigines from schools by the department of Public Instruction. A complaint from a single parent could be enough to remove all Aboriginal children from a school.\textsuperscript{57} Nor are these issues of local exclusivism restricted to the past, as Gillian Cowlishaw has shown in her study of 1980s race relations in rural New South Wales. Through an in-depth look at attitudes and forms of consciousness among political participants in "Brindleton", she showed how the new "enlightenment policies" emanating out of urban centres were strongly resisted by town councilors and white locals in rural areas where the caste barriers were well and truly alive.\textsuperscript{58}

An assumption underlying my thesis is that most people think and feel at least something about the nation, and that an emergent Aboriginal nationalism presents dilemmas for non-Aboriginal nationalist thought and emotion. How the nation-state responds depends in part on the way the nation's people can imagine alternative futures, new arrangements of social life and new ways of accommodating difference. It will also depend on the capacity of a colonial people to go through a process of mourning: for the loss of the former colonial subject, its progressivist and triumphalist view of history, and its belief in its own modern project.

\textsuperscript{57}Barry Morris \textit{Domesticating Resistance}, pp. 112-13.
\textsuperscript{58}See Gillian Cowlishaw, \textit{Black, White or Brindle}, 1988.
Chapter One: Nationalist Discourse, Psychoanalysis and Ideology

A nation is, as Benedict Anderson argued, a modern imagined community. This formulation alerts one to the subjective involvement of co-nationals in the reconstitution of the nation at a symbolic level on a day by day basis. The nation exists only if the majority of its subjects continue to believe that it exists, or at least behave as if it does. A nation involves and depends upon more than such subjective belief. Subjective belief in the nation as the foundation of legitimate political community itself depends upon certain institutional changes in the nature of group life associated with modernity. In this chapter I argue that a deeper understanding of Australian settler-nationalism is obtained from a close examination of nationalist discourse, the idiom through which people express their national identity. I suggest that certain psychoanalytic concepts are useful in thinking about national identities and the interaction of individuals within nations. I outline the concept of ideology that is employed in this thesis to critique settler-nationalism’s interaction with Australia’s indigenous peoples and with “Aboriginality.”

Ernest Gellner produced a deservedly influential account of the broad socio-cultural and economic changes standing behind the emergence of nationalism. Of fundamental importance to the rise of nations and of nationalist expression were the great social changes associated with the shift from agrarian based to industrially based society. The main structural feature of agrarian societies, he argues, is social status differentiation. This principle of social integration, of relatively set social statuses—ascribed and stable—was given expression in such societies in subtle ways by culture, which underwrote, rendered visible, and reinforced them. Shared culture did not create wide ranging bonds, nor did it underwrite political boundaries. Social structure took care of that. But modernity

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brought an important shift, leaving individuals without rigid and ascribed social status. Individuals now had to make their positions in a variety of social contracts with others. Importantly, members of modern societies had to speak in the same *idiom* in order to make those contracts. This was an ultimately homogenising pressure, producing shared culture, a “large, anonymous and mobile mass of individuals.”² One of the necessary conditions of existence of the industrial age, as a perpetual “growth” society, was a mobile, creative citizenry capable of producing, understanding and responding to context-free forms of communication.³ “The need for cultural homogeneity” he argued “follows from the requirements of rapid, easy and precise communication, of the possibility of slotting people into new economic roles, of a complex, sophisticated, and quickly changing division of labour.”⁴ Cultural homogeneity became imperative only when one’s very livelihood—one’s very chances to get on in life—depended upon one’s capacity to manipulate cultural resources. “If citizenship, effective membership, ‘belonging’ but also, less sentimentally, effective enjoyment of rights, depends on culture”, he argued, “it follows that loyalties will also be expressed in terms of it.”⁵ In industrial society culture became one’s lifeblood and, as it became more consciously appropriated—as one kept bumping up against its limits like a “fly coming up against the window-pane”—it was worshipped not through abstract symbols, religious or otherwise, but in itself. This direct honouring of one’s shared culture, Gellner argues, *is* nationalism.⁶ Because culture, rather than social structure was the new force holding industrial society together, it should come as no surprise that political heat,

⁶Ernest Gellner, “Nationalism and the two forms of cohesion in complex societies”, 1987, quote at p. 16. See also *Encounters with Nationalism*, p. viii.
intense feeling, infuses nationalism. Nor should it surprise us that the nation tends to become *sacralised*.8

Gellner's general theory provides important insights into nationalism, but little guidance for the analysis of specific nationalisms. Perry Anderson, in an otherwise approving essay, makes the telling point that Gellner has skirted the explanation of the more vicious forms of nationalism, like Nazism, or the nationalist elements of the first World War.9 The reason for this, he argues, is because Gellner's account is really grounded in economic functionalism—Gellner wants to see nationalism and the nation-state as largely beneficial and necessary for industrial functioning and for individual liberty. Anderson argues that Gellner overlooks what is really central to our understanding of nationalism: its meaning, individual and collective, to its adherents, “that is, not its functionality for industry, but its fulfilment of identity.” We need to focus not only on the cause of nationalism but upon its meaning for those who live it. To do this, Anderson suggests, recourse to a theory like psychoanalysis might in the end prove beneficial.10

Alan Finlayson has pointed to a similar deficit. He argues that Gellner largely excludes from his account an analysis of the political. “With his emphasis on a structural functional approach,” Finlayson argues, “he pays too little attention to the realm of possibility, and the hegemonic articulation of possibility, which is precisely the field...”

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7*Encounters with Nationalism*, p. 63.
8*Encounters with Nationalism*, pp. 72-3.
10“Max Weber and Ernest Gellner: Science, Politics, Enchantment,” p. 205. Ernest Gellner was at least aware that his theory had not dealt adequately with the more virulent forms of nationalism, which he later discussed at length and with his typical insight in his 1993 essay titled “The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class”. Reprinted in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed.) *Mapping the Nation*, pp. 98-145. While not delving into the psychology of identity, Gellner did point to the political fissures which stimulated such virulent nationalist agendas exemplified by Nazism, and which threaten to resurface as future expressions of nationalism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.
of the political.”¹¹ The nation is an intrinsically political form, inextricably bound up with “the experiences and attitudes of those who actually inhabit” it. Finlayson calls for specificity in our understanding of nationalism, otherwise we will miss most of what it is actually about. How do people describe their nation? How do such descriptions and beliefs about their nation relate to, and infuse, other political projects?¹² I explore and answer these questions through the analysis of forms of nationalist discourse.

**Nationalist Discourse**

As collective identity the nation must be continually sustained and reinforced, and at times reinvented. National boundaries, symbolic and physical, though they present to the individual as natural, are always contestable and must be reproduced or transformed through on going social action. In this sense we should think of the nation as “a goal rather than an actuality.”¹³ The discursive field of nationalism is complex and conflictual: the nation is reproduced through discourses that refer directly to the nation and to national interests, but also through those that do not refer explicitly to the nation, which nonetheless are framed by national imaginings.¹⁴ The nation means different things to different people, and different conceptions and lived experiences of national identity coexist under the same national umbrella. Michael Billig has referred to a series of practices and utterances that “flag” the nation, reinforcing day after day feelings of national belonging as the “banal” reality that can be drawn upon at times of crisis to produce “hot” nationalism. The structuring of news in newspapers, he argues, highlights the particularity of national interest; certain items are deemed more important than others for the nationals within a particular nation-state, thus subtly reinforcing a feeling of distinctness and


¹³This is Peter Alter’s phrase, quoted by Kathryn A. Manzo in *Creating Boundaries*, 1996, p. 38. She argues that nations must be constantly narrated and boundaries reinterpreted and sustained, pp. 38-40.

separateness in relation to the people of other nations.\textsuperscript{15} There are a myriad other processes of a similar kind which produce similar effects. Nationalism in his view is endemic rather than spasmodic, even in the age of globalisation.\textsuperscript{16} Benedict Anderson has argued that the very forms of the novel and, more especially, the daily newspaper, serve to produce and reproduce, day after day that feeling of belonging to an abstract national community: what Renan termed a sort of daily plebiscite.\textsuperscript{17} These forms, Anderson argues, “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation.” Both had devices for the presentation of simultaneity in homogenous, empty time. The novel presented society as a sociological organism moving calendrically through time and, as such, produced a “precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.”\textsuperscript{18} The newspaper produced two kinds of imagined linkage: a) empty time was filled with a series of events that somehow cohered under a date, and b) the newspaper as a kind of book was linked to a common market, a community of buyers. Anderson emphasised the daily habit of reading the same national newspapers as a practice which reproduced feelings of belonging to a common community moving together in solidarity, and at the same pace, through the same historical time:

\[\ldots\text{the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is}\]

\textsuperscript{15}“...the deixis of homeland is embedded in the very fabric of the newspapers.” \textit{Banal Nationalism}, p. 94. “Deixis”, Billig informs us, is a linguistic term describing the process whereby the “I” of the speaker is linked with the “you” of the listener to create the “we” of community. It is also involved in the inculcation of feelings of homely space. See pp. 105-9. For an excellent dissection of the way that Australian “dailies” and “weeklies” configure the contours of nation and people, see Colin Mercer, “Regular Imaginings: The Newspaper and the Nation” 1992.

\textsuperscript{16}Michael Billig, \textit{Banal Nationalism}, 1995, pp. 6-10.

\textsuperscript{17}Ernest Renan, “What is a nation?”, 1990, p. 19; Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, p. 30.

\textsuperscript{18}Imagined Communities, pp. 30-1.
visibly rooted in everyday life. . . fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations.¹⁹

There is a more direct and explicit discourse of the nation, to be found in public utterance, in political speeches, in written histories, memoirs and so on. These imaginings are instantiated in government policies, and institutionalised in legislation. They are the stuff of public debate, and become part of the arsenal used to mould that illusive but potent phenomenon “public opinion.” It is to these forms that I primarily turn in this thesis to explore settler-nationalism.

As an initial illustration of settler-nationalist discourse, consider the following argument for a greater acceptance of Aboriginal traditions within the Australian nation, that emerges from a legal essay. The legal scholar Ellinghaus has argued that Australia’s national identity needs to be strengthened by the development of a truly Australian contract law. A key assumption guiding his argument is that a strong national identity is important:

It is . . . not useless or unreasonable to interest oneself in such matters as national culture, independence or identity. National communities are the most potent political organisations so far constructed by man; certainly no better vehicle will in the foreseeable future be devised for the political welfare of the Australian continent.²⁰

This is in keeping with the deeply held assumptions of many people in the era of nations and nationalism. However, what he then goes on to say about the way that nations are formed, and the implication of this for the culture and law of nations is somewhat less commonplace. All nations, he argues, are constructed from an indigenous and a later settler population. The true nation is only fully formed once the two have become thoroughly integrated. He thus calls for that act of incorporation which would see elements of

¹⁹ Imagined Communities, pp. 39-40.
Aboriginal law enter into the main body of Australian law. This is needed, he argues, in order not only to recognise Aboriginal aspirations and rights, but to bring Australian civilisation to maturity, and to produce a culture which more fully belongs on the Australian continent.

The notion of a maturing civilisation or nation is a commonplace of Australian settler-nationalist discourse that warrants closer inspection. John Hutchinson argues that immigrant nations, because they are “new” societies, are marked by “status anxieties”, formulated in a language of “maturation.” In contemporary Australia it is sometimes argued that “we” face a crisis of national identity, and more consistently that this or that element is required in order to achieve “our” national identity. Maturity has physical and psychological overtones. When applied to the ‘nation’ it becomes a form of teleology. The nation is naturalised as the form of community that we are headed for as part of our development. It is a natural end point, prefigured as such in our very make-up. There is a kind of sliding here between biology and culture. The cultural body matures just as the physical body matures. Part of this process is the integration of component elements in the service of a quasi pre-ordained higher unity. For Ellinghaus there is also an explicit agenda propelling the call for integration of indigenous elements. Not only was such integration fundamental to “our” sense of belonging, it would mend a nationalist dilemma by providing “us” with the sense of historical continuity for “our” civilisation which it now lacks. Incorporation of elements of Aboriginal law would lead to an indigenisation of Australian law, and would complement what Ellinghaus sees as the other important shift: away from the reliance on English case law and on the decisions of English courts generally. It would be part of a process whereby “our” nation could recover the intellectual achievement of the Aborigines:

Our history of ideas includes that of more than forty millennia of Aboriginal presence. ... A national culture must be an integument for all, and particularly its oldest, members. We

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must recover and reinstate the Aboriginal past before we can be at ease on this continent.22

Where Ellinghaus uses the term civilisation, we might read nation; but it is a curious broadening of the term nation, where the nation becomes coextensive with the history of the continent itself. Notice, also, how the "we" of his argument shifts in the discourse, revealing the fundamental ambiguity of the concept of nation which the "we" is meant to refer to. The "we" of Australian civilisation includes both Aborigines and non-Aboriginal settlers, while the "we" which "will not be at ease" until the Aboriginal component is integrated, is also the national or civilisational "we," but excludes Aborigines who, presumably, do not share "our" unease or "our" sense of not belonging. Such shifting meanings of the "we" of the nation are revealing. They express the desire for homogeny of historical experience while indicating that such homogeny does not in fact exist. Implicit is the realisation that we are not really talking about one nation but two, or even several. But the desire for one nation, one people, one continent blurs the distinctions. The nation as myth has always existed. It must have always been there, otherwise how could we believe in its indestructibility? The nation must in a sense be eternal, an entity that is always already there. Thus the incorporation of Aboriginal identities, history, intellectual, legal and cultural traditions after a long period of active exclusion, is seen not as an attempt at reinvention, but as a recovery of what has always been part of the nation.

Those readers with an interest in Australian history and politics will note that this way of conceiving the Australian nation goes against the traditional grain, but is a phenomenon that is becoming more commonplace, especially as national commentators attempt to find ways to articulate the "bringing in" of Aboriginality to the Australian nation since the 1967 Referendum. Chandran Kukathas has recently given expression to a similar conception of the "rainbow nation". He makes a distinction between national character, which relies on notions of blood and ethnicity, and national identity, which is based on moral inheritance, and can thus

accommodate a range of cultures. This inclusive view of national identity when applied to Australia reads as follows:

In the case of Australia, a national identity is given by an ancient Aboriginal inheritance, a history of European colonisation, a common-law legal tradition, and liberal-democratic political institutions. However, this political community, and so ‘national identity,’ has been shaped primarily by Britain, which bequeathed not only a common language, but also the legal and political vocabulary in which public affairs have been conducted.\textsuperscript{23}

The more traditional view excludes the first part of this formulation, and emphasises the second: the Australian nation is essentially a product of Europe—or even more specifically Britain—transplanted to the bottom of the world. Descending from a British institutional base, and from British ways of life, so the argument continues, the Australians have forged a culture firmly rooted in those traditions and ways of life.

These varied understandings or imaginings of the nation I broadly collect under two terms—\textit{indigenising} and \textit{assimilationist} settler-nationalisms. Ellinghaus and Kukathus represent forms of indigenising settler-nationalism, while those who exclude Aboriginality from the nation, and define the latter as almost exclusively a British-derived entity, represent assimilationist settler-nationalism. I will explain these modes of settler-nationalism in detail in chapter 4.

Nationalism, as the above examples suggest, involves the construction of an imagined “we.” The phrase “we, the people”, so important to nationalist (and democratic) discourse, operates as if it were a natural entity, rather than an ongoing political achievement. As a category it is conceived as both the source and the natural custodian of the national interest. Appeals to the national interest often strike one as disinterested, and as giving to a particular claim the ring of unquestionable truth. Strengthening of the national “we” is often seen as a good in itself; whatever serves to detract from it is seen as bad, or even dangerous and threatening. The “nation”

operates as a powerful tool in political discourse, and the way that it is constructed, as imagined community, is an important feature of the political process. Whether Australia is in fact a single unified nation, or a series of national and other communities held together under one state, political discourse is most typically framed by the assumption that national unity, and national identity, are political virtues, perhaps even necessities, and that they at least approximate the reality of contemporary Australian society. Nevertheless this very assumption is one of the issues at stake in political debate, nowhere more potently than in the discourse surrounding Aboriginal rights. The implicit and explicit assertions of distinct and/or separate Aboriginal identities call into question the legitimacy of the settler-nation to decide on and to be involved in indigenous community affairs.

National Identities: the Contribution of Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis provides a powerful set of concepts with which to think about and to theorise the complexities of identity. National communities, while different to small groups, or larger groups like the church or army, share certain group features; they can be thought of as group-like entities, and the insights of psychoanalysis concerning the functioning of groups can be used to explore the way that national communities behave, and the ways that individuals interact within their nation.

The concept of identification was central to Freud's analysis of group psychology. Individuals in a group identified with each other. An early form of identification, involving idealization of an object— in Freud's view typically a father figure—was of central importance to this argument. The leader of a group was idealized as something greater than the individual's own ego, and through identification the leader was taken in as an ego-ideal. All individuals in a group did the same thing, and thus were identified with each other. A group was "a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego." In nations, co-nationals

24This is C. Fred Alford's term, and he makes the distinction, in his Group Psychology and Political Theory, 1994, pp. 12-14.
25Freud, Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, (1921), 1985, p. 147. I
partake of a complex series of identifications: with each other, with national leaders and idealized national heroes (the greater national selves which serve as the image that each individual strives towards), and with an abstract or imagined nation. Identification itself can be broken down into several forms, related to the gradual organisation of the mental apparatus from its most primitive to its most mature state. Thus, for example, at a certain level of attachment to leaders, identification is of a more cannibalistic and narcissistic kind, associated with the early phases of the Oedipal complex where the child, in a sense, swallows a parental figure, so that it becomes a part of him or herself. The identification with the leader thus means an enlargement of the self. These more archaic forms of identification may, in certain circumstances, be the central form of association between members of a group, or a nation. The nation also serves as a social form of an ego-ideal, and is identified with in that way, as a common ego ideal typically embodied in a leader.

What does a nation do for the individual, in a psychological sense? Firstly, it acts as a container for anxieties and provides an outlet for the expression of passions. The 'nation' as group-like entity works to contain personal fears and gives expression to fantasies which are often unconscious. It represents a form of kinship and unity in the face of international allies and enemies. In a world of violent conflicts and communal rifts, it offers the promise of unity and security. Within the life of the nation the tenuous individual gains a measure of immortality, enclosed by a mother or

follow here Adorno’s excellent discussion of aspects of this work that he drew upon to explain fascism and the appeal of fascist propaganda. See Theodor Adorno “Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda”, 1982.


On the national tie as libidinous see Benedict Anderson’s discussion of nationalism and racism, and his argument about the peculiar air of selflessness and majesty that imubes sacrifice for the nation, in Imagined Communities, ch. 8. The anthropologist John Morton has directed attention to the relationship between kinship ties and the symbolism of national ties. See his “Aboriginality, Mabo and the Republic,” 1996, pp. 124-5.
fatherland that conceives, sustains in life, and receives again in death. The nation is a homeland that provides a measure of safety and enclosure, of particular, special, and well-nigh unbreakable ties.\textsuperscript{29}

Belonging to a nation is in a fundamental sense a question of being situated in a system of identities. Identities, national or otherwise, are neither self-enclosed nor purely self-referential. They are formed in relation to and against others. An analogy may be drawn from the study of the development of individual identity, where the key psychoanalytic insight is that, from its beginnings, the self is thoroughly embroiled with others, at the level of its very formation, and in its ongoing activities. This area of study is typically referred to in psychoanalytic writings as the study of intersubjectivity. Through a mesh of involvement with ‘objects’ or others, involving phantasy, desire, imagination, projection, identification (and projective identification), the self gradually builds itself up. Freud argued in “The Ego and The Id” (1923), extending his earlier analysis from his essay “Mourning and Melancholia” (1917), that a “character” (an identity) was formed through a process involving the introjection into the developing ego of a series of “lost” objects. The ego was largely formed out of these introjections.\textsuperscript{30} Melanie Klein, and the object relations theorists influenced by her work, broadened this understanding of the emergence of the self and of the psychological processes central to intersubjective relations. A classic statement of the object relational approach was made in Klein’s essay “Notes on some Schizoid Mechanisms”:

I have often expressed my view that object-relations exist from the beginning of life, the first object being the mother’s breast which to the child becomes split into a good (gratifying) and


\textsuperscript{30}Freud \textit{The Ego and the Id}, (1923), 1957, p. 28. For a very good discussion of the Freudian understanding of the emergence of the self, see Anthony Elliott, “Psychoanalysis and Social Theory”, 1996, pp. 173-5.
bad (frustrating) breast; this splitting results in a severence of love and hate. I have further suggested that the relation to the first object implies its introjection and projection, between internal and external objects and situations. These processes participate in the building up of the ego and superego and prepare the ground for the onset of the Oedipus complex in the second half of the first year.\textsuperscript{31}

Klein provided a rich account of the emergence of subjectivity that can be drawn upon fruitfully in understanding national identity. I will be making use of several of her key insights in this thesis, so it is appropriate that I briefly outline the major concepts.

For Klein the individual is a seed-bed of conflicting passions. This is so from early infancy, and is evident most potently in relations between infant and mother. Klein argues that in the infant psyche exist all the passions that infuse the adult world: love, hate, guilt, destructiveness, envy, sadism and masochism, omnipotent thought, fears of persecution and so on. Each of these is directed at self and mother which, at the beginning of life, are difficult for the infant to distinguish: a partial merging, a flow of inner and outer “part-objects” through the processes of projection and introjection. Gradually as the process of separation and emergence of the self unfolds, phantasies, some of them terrifying, are played out against the mother and, through her, the world. Processes of introjection and projection are central to Klein’s understanding of this emergence of self and orientation to the world:

The development of the infant is governed by the mechanisms of introjection and projection. From the beginning the ego introjects objects ‘good’ and ‘bad’, for both of which the mother’s breast is the prototype—for good objects when the child obtains it, for bad ones when it fails him. But it is because the baby projects its own aggression on to these objects that it feels them to be ‘bad’ and not only in that they frustrate its desires: the child conceives of them as actually dangerous—persecutors who it fears will devour it, scoop out the inside of

its body, cut it to pieces, poison it—in short, compasing its destruction by all the means which sadism can devise.\textsuperscript{32}

Not only does the infant see these persecutors in the world; he or she introjects them into the ego. Persecution is inside so to speak, and no amount of projection will free the infant of the anxiety and dread this produces.

This depiction of the child’s inner world is characteristic of what Klein terms the paranoid-schizoid position, which the child generally occupies for the first three or four months of life. As Hanna Segal puts it:

The leading anxiety in the paranoid-schizoid position is that the persecutory object or objects will get inside the ego and overwhelm and annihilate both the ideal object and the self. These features of the anxiety and object-relationships experienced during this phase of development led Klein to call it the paranoid-schizoid position, since the leading anxiety is paranoid, and the state of the ego and its objects is characterized by the splitting, which is schizoid.\textsuperscript{33}

Klein argued that paranoid anxiety was “counteracted by extreme and powerful defences, such as splitting, omnipotence and denial,”\textsuperscript{34} and importantly, a process related to all of these which she called projective identification where the individual attempts to control the internal and external world by projecting parts of the self outside into others.\textsuperscript{35} Gradually, in the course of normal development the child shifts to the depressive position. This is a movement towards a lessening of the propensity to split the self and the world. The self, the mother and others are now seen more as whole objects which contain both good and bad, towards which one feels both love and hatred. Through the gradual mastering of the dilemmas, anxieties and desires of the depressive position

\textsuperscript{34}Klein “Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding The Emotional Life of the Infant”, 1988, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{35}Klein, “Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms.”
“splitting and projection decrease and the drive towards integration of the ego and the object can gradually take the upper hand.” The defences against anxiety become more complex and multifarious, involving, initially, the development of obsessions, such as that with “cleanliness”, as part of more general reparative trends, and repression as the separation between unconscious and conscious becomes more marked, and the integration of ego, superego and their functions in concert become more organised and cohesive. It is important that for Kleinians the depressive position is not a complete overcoming of the psychological operations of the earlier position. These operations remain available to the individual. Psychological position is thus distinguished from a phase or stage of development; there can be more or less wholesale regression to the paranoid-schizoid position in certain anxiety producing situations, and even in the normal conditions pertaining to the depressive position paranoid-schizoid mechanisms, such as splitting and projection, remain operative to some extent. Some authors, like Thomas Ogden, prefer to see the positions as existing in a dialectical

38Hanna Segal writes:

No experience in human development is ever cast aside or obliterated; we must remember that in the most normal individual there will be some situations which will stir up the earliest anxieties and bring into operation the earliest mechanisms of defence. Furthermore, in a well-integrated personality, all stages of development are included, none are split off and rejected; and certain achievements of the ego in the paranoid-schizoid position are indeed very important for later development, for which they lay the foundations. They have a role to play in the most mature and integrated personality.

*Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein*, p. 35.

relationship. Though he recognizes that maturation occurs through linear time, he argues that a self emerges out of an ongoing interplay between the two positions:

...the subject is conceived of as existing in psychoanalytic time (as opposed to linear, sequential time), thus partaking of all facets of subjectivity, all forms of primitivity and maturity, simultaneously and in shifting inter-relatedness.\(^{40}\)

Moreover, in his view the dialectic between positions is psychologically productive rather than simply regressive, allowing for psychic change as the de-integrative, decentering pressures associated with the paranoid-schizoid position act to disrupt stagnation and closure, or the "arrogance" of the depressive position.

Reparation is the term used by Kleinians to explore the way that the individual seeks to repair, in phantasy, what it believes it has earlier destroyed, or attempted to destroy. Reparation is intricately related to destructiveness—which the ego attempts to undo—and to feelings of depressive guilt which the ego wants to diminish. It is thus characteristic of the depressive position, and depends upon a level of integration of the ego, and the recognition of objects as whole rather than part or split. The infant feels aggressive impulses towards the mother, which in turn give rise to powerful feelings of guilt and fear that the loved mother-object will be lost. The child believes that its own aggressive acts have destroyed the mother, or her representative the breast. Acts of reparation are engaged in to repair damage done by the self; if these are perceived as restoring the mother or the breast, the seed is planted from which will grow the sense of separateness, and the capacity to feel love for others. Reparation is the basis of sublimation and creativeness.\(^{41}\)

The way that the settler nation has begun to respond to the indigenous in the second half of this century can be viewed fruitfully through the lens of psychoanalysis. Policies of absorption

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\(^{40}\)Thomas H. Ogden, "The Dialectically Constituted/Decentered Subject of Psychoanalysis. II. The Contributions of Klein and Winnicott", 1992. Quote at p. 615. Ogden adds his own third position, the *autistic-contiguous*, which is more primitive than Klein's two positions.

\(^{41}\)Hanna Segal went on to explore creativity through the concept of reparation. See *The Work of Hanna Segal*, 1986, Part VI.
and assimilation—as I will explain more thoroughly in chapter three—from the late 1930s paved the way for the gradual inclusion of the indigenous into the Australian nation after their long period of exclusion. Though guided by politico-economic imperatives, these policies entailed complex subjective involvements that provided the political will for, and sustained the carrying through of, associated practices. The importance of these subjective resources is frequently underplayed, as it is left largely unexplained in theories of nationalism. At a subjective level absorption and assimilation policies gave expression to both destructive and reparative desires, and responded to either explicit or veiled guilt feelings among white settlers.

From one angle and for some in the settler-community Aborigines remained "bad part-objects" that were to be destroyed or got rid of, only now in a more rationally coordinated and scientific manner than in the days of frontier "dispersal": absorbing the indigenous meant the gradual dissolution of Aboriginal blood, and thus of any trace of Aboriginality that had survived the initial frontier conflicts. In this way the purity of white Australia could be preserved. Another important strain, however, had to do with a conception of humanitarian or nationalist responsibility for those whose land was taken, and who continued to reside within the borders of the national state. Typically this was voiced along the lines of "We will fail our own conception of ourselves as a great socially progressive, egalitarian nation if we fail to bring the Aborigines into our community through lifting them to a higher state of culture and existence."

When Sir Paul Hasluck, in an historic Private member’s motion in 1950, put the case for national responsibility for the better treatment of the Aborigines, arguing the need for their assimilation, he prefaced his remarks with the following comment:

I do not intend to raise a scandal or to apportion blame in any particular quarter. If there is cause for blame, I do not think that it can be placed upon any administration or official. The neglect of this social problem in the past has been neglect on the part of the Australian community as a whole. The community as a whole must, therefore, bear the blame. The purpose of my motion is not to place the blame on
administrators, but to arouse the Australian nation to some sense of its responsibility for its short-comings in this matter.\textsuperscript{42}

He went on to argue that the nation as a community had this responsibility; the Commonwealth government as the only body that could claim to represent the whole nation therefore had to take a leading role in the improvement of the Aboriginal condition. The nation that prided itself on its concern for social welfare and for human rights the world over, unless it improved its own administration of Aboriginal affairs, would not stand up to the scrutiny of the international community:

When we enter into international discussions, and raise our voice, as we should raise it, in defence of human rights and the protection of human welfare, our very words are mocked by the thousands of degraded and depressed people who crouch on rubbish heaps throughout the whole of this continent. Let us cleanse this stain from our forehead or we shall run the risk that ill-intentioned people will point to it with scorn. When we have done that we shall be able to stand with greater pride and more confidence before the world as a self-respecting nation.\textsuperscript{43}

Guilt for Klein was in close interrelation with reparation; the latter through repair or restoration of the object contributes to the lessening of guilt feelings (depressive anxiety) inspired by the damage done to good objects. Despite the considerable debate over the apportioning of blame and guilt, there is no doubt that reparative action only occurs if a certain level of guilt is activated. This does not mean that even during reparative acts individuals and groups can not continue to engage in acts of denial of guilt. Moreover, individuals can advocate acts of reparation on the part of a group with which he or she identifies, even though he or she has not personally taken part in destructive acts towards good objects. Objects which were constructed in earlier phases of history as bad objects might later come to be seen more ambivalently or even as


good objects that reparative gestures need to be engaged in towards.

One way this has come about in our specific case is the way that, through the course of history, Aborigines have moved, at least somewhat, from a position of being outsiders to the nation to a position where they are now deemed to be part of the nation. Bringing Aborigines into the 'goodness' of the nation is itself a reparative gesture; it is in another sense an act of restoration—Aboriginal humanity is restored where it had been maligned and used as the basis, through race stereotyping, to cut Aborigines off from the nation. Hasluck in the above also points to the restoration of the nation as community through the removing of "the stain from our foreheads", pointing to a restoration of a damaged national-self through the improvement of the conditions of life of the Aborigines.

In Kleinian terms we might also consider Hasluck's statement as a cultural expression of depressive position tendencies, in that the nation is less an idealised object than it is an object capable of inflicting harm and of doing wrong; there is a level of that acceptance of ambivalence which indicates that the nation is taken as whole rather than part object.

As I have emphasised above, psychoanalysis never assumes the self to be a natural entity, always-already-there, and nor does it assume it to be free from contradiction or the possibility of fragmentation. And yet a self is 'real', something in and of the world, which acts and has an effect upon others, and upon institutions. The self or identity is a fragile entity, never fully conscious of the desires that drive it. The self exists in a world of good, bad and ambivalent objects, objects which can provide comfort and support for it, objects that can defend it against enemies, and objects that are dangerous, hostile, or troubling. Bad objects can become repositories for hatreds that have their real source elsewhere. The self does this by making use of, and by being under the sway of, the psychological processes of introjection and identification, projection and splitting.44

A nation is not a "self," and yet we can draw from our understanding of the development of individual identity to

44 An excellent study of such processes is Rae Sherwood's *The Psychodynamics of Race*, 1980.
understand the way that a national identity is experienced and lived. The members of nations imagine themselves, create themselves against a vision of others who do and do not belong, who are and are not like the national selves. The way that a nation’s others are imagined often gives the clue to the way that members of the nation imagine themselves: how those others are experienced—as real sensuous beings, and as images and perceptions—is an important feature of the process of the formation of national identity. The world is split into good and bad national objects, enemies and allies, those who would defend and those who would persecute, those who are a benign force in terms of supporting national identity and those whose very presence within national boundaries might cause that identity to unravel. There is a paradox involved here. On the one hand the ideologues of nations assert, through their metaphors of natural development and growth, the strength of their own nation and its fated accomplishment. On the other hand these ideologues are beset with paranoia concerning the ability of ‘others’ to hinder the nation on that path, or even undermine that national identity; a partial admission of the very air of fragile createdness that hangs around any nation. Where the others are outside the national territory the implications of this aspect of national imagining might be relatively benign; but it has serious implications for those who are within the national imagined space.

The use of psychoanalysis to discuss nationalism and national identity is thus not simply by way of analogy. The psychoanalytic view of the formation of subjectivity through intersubjectivity provides us with a way of exploring the links between individual and group identities, emotion and social action, through the medium of historically transforming discourses and ideologies.

**Ideology and Settler-Nationalism**

So far in the discussion I have referred for the most part to discourses of nationalism. I want to preserve a distinction between discourse, the symbolic, representations, systems of signification or social consciousness on the one hand and ideology on the other. Ideology I use in the restricted sense advocated by writers like John B. Thompson, Anthony Giddens and Terry Eagleton. Thompson has argued persuasively for preserving the sense of ideology as a
critical concept, as something "essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power—that is, to the process of maintaining domination." He thus argued against a more expansive and neutral concept of ideology, as culture, or as any system of ideas. In order to carry through ideology critique, Thompson argues, one "must provide a cogent analysis of power and domination within the context of an account of the relations between action, institutions and social structure."\textsuperscript{45} Giddens argued for three essential functions of ideology in modern societies, each tied to the concealment of "domination... as domination": 1) the representation of sectional interests as universal ones; 2) the denial or transmutation of contradictions; and 3) the naturalisation of the present, or reification.\textsuperscript{46} Eagleton points to a similar set of ways that ideologies function in modern society, including: the promotion of beliefs and values congenial to the maintenance of a set of dominative power relations; the naturalisation and universalisation of such beliefs and values and the denigration of views opposing them; the exclusion of rival forms of thought (a kind of systematic distortion of communication); and the obscuring and mystification of social reality in convenient ways (i.e. through the masking or suppression of real social conflicts). He concludes that in "any actual ideological formation, all... of these strategies are likely to interact in complex ways."\textsuperscript{47}

The concept of ideology is thus inextricably tied to notions of power and domination, and individual and group interests. The key defining issue is not the epistemological polarity between science and ideology, but the relationship between sectional interest and ideology—the way that ideology serves the reproduction of an order of domination. Though, as Giddens has pointed out, questions of epistemology can not be removed entirely from the definition and examination of ideology, the dividing line between the symbol systems of science and ideology—conceived for example as a division between valid and invalid knowledge claims—is not central

\textsuperscript{46}See Anthony Giddens "Ideology and Consciousness", 1979, especially pp. 193-97.
\textsuperscript{47}Terry Eagleton, \textit{Ideology}, 1991, pp. 5-6. He explores the workings of these in ch. 2.
to the definition of ideology. Terry Eagleton makes a related point when he argues for the *relational* nature of ideology: it is about power-interests served and political effects generated. Any set of ideas (including scientific ones), representations or myths can be ideological depending upon how they are used in politically significant situations. Eagleton argues that, however difficult it is to prove or disprove a hierarchy of political significance, it is important to view ideology as relating to the most central relations of power in society. Ideology, Eagleton argues, is “a discursive or semiotic phenomenon.” It is “material” in the same sense that signs are material entities: social and practical. In other words, ideologies are defined not formally as types of language, but discursively—i.e. in relation to the context-specific effects they engender.

Australian settler-nationalism is a formation containing different ways of thinking and feeling about nation and national belonging; it is not, however, completely ideological in the senses alluded to above. “It may help to view ideology less as a particular set of discourses”, Eagleton argues, “than as a particular set of effects within discourses”. Along with Giddens I refer to the ideological aspects of the symbol-systems of settler-nationalism. Within all discourses of the national there is typically an ideological moment, and some settler-national discourses can be seen as predominantly ideological: i.e., in the main they work to reproduce a set of dominating power relations, a set of discriminatory and/or exclusionary practices. While there are several dimensions through which nationalism performs ideological functions—for example, in relation to class, race, gender, ethnicity, immigration etc.—the senses in which forms of settler-nationalism are ideological will be explored, in this thesis, through their implications for the indigenous: for the construction of ongoing regimes of domination of settler over indigenous societies, for conceptions of who the indigenous are (in an ontological sense and as political subjects more specifically), and of their rights and responsibilities.

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49 Terry Eagleton, *Ideology*, p. 9 and ch. 1 more generally.
My concern with settler-nationalism thus takes the form of ideology critique. Through an analysis of various examples of settler-national discourse I will be highlighting the ways in which these serve ideological purposes. John B. Thompson wrote approvingly of the effort of theorists endeavouring to conjoin "a theoretical account of ideology with an empirical and historical analysis of its concrete forms". John Cash in a recent book on political conflict in Northern Ireland has argued vigorously and persuasively for the virtues of "theory with an empirical intent", filling out his claim with his own extensive analysis of ideologies and identities in conflict. Since I have been influenced by his approach to the study of ideology in developing my own approach, and especially so in the formulation of my two modes of settler-nationalism, it is appropriate that I briefly explain its key features.

Cash defines ideology as

...a dynamic and relatively autonomous system of signification, communication and subjection which operates by constructing a social and political order and subjecting human beings to cathected positions within this order.\(^{52}\)

Certain features of this definition, and Cash's general account of ideology, push in a direction away from the more limited critical concept I have been advocating. This is not to say that Cash works with a *neutral* concept of ideology. For example, the emphasis in his definition is upon processes of *subjection*, and in his more general account he is concerned with "patterns of distorted communication", suggesting, at the very least, that it might be possible to achieve patterns of communication that are *less* distorted. Not all forms of discourse are ideological, only those that perform the function of subjecting individuals to positions in the social and political order.\(^{53}\) Cash's stress on "subjection" preserves a critical role for the concept of ideology; however, all discursive forms of subjection are, for Cash, ideological. It would seem, from such a perspective, that even


\(^{53}\)Thus he adds to the above definition of ideology by commenting that "strictly speaking a structure of signification, communication and subjection is ideological insofar as it performs the above operations." See Cash, *Identity, Ideology and Conflict*, p. 70.
emancipatory discourses, to the extent that they subject individuals to a political and social order (however emancipatory), would be deemed ideological; this goes beyond my definition. Since such discourses are not, in Thompson’s words, “essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical relations of power”, there seems no reason why they should be deemed ideological. Nevertheless, if one bears in mind my more restricted sense, Cash’s explanation is illuminating in several respects, not the least of which concerns the way that he highlights and explores the often neglected affective dimensions of ideology. “Relative autonomy” is a concept taken from the work of Louis Althusser and relates to Marx’s base/superstructure metaphor, and to Marxist notions of society consisting of different, analytically distinguishable levels of a social formation, with the economic being “determinant in the last instance.” Ideologies, Cash argues, do not act in a purely autonomous fashion but in relation to the other levels of the social formation: the economic, the political, the judicial, and so on. Orders of determination, one might add, need to be established in specific empirical situations and cannot be assumed from the outset according to some abstract formula. Thus one can not assume that the economic determines the ideological in any straightforward fashion, even if economic conditions always shape the ideological. Similarly certain social structural features, including the international context, can be seen to have a determining impact on ideological formations, but this does not mean that ideology merely reflects these circumstances. For a start ideological formations have a certain internal dynamic, or as Habermas puts it in his study of normative structures, an internal history of development. Under certain circumstances the ideological process can take precedence, having a huge impact on economic and political conditions.

The construction of a social and political order at the level of the Symbolic involves a complex ordering of relations between persons, citizens, identities, and governments, in fact an entire world view. Taking up a position within these symbolic orders means emotional involvement. Cash uses the term “cathectic”, drawn from psychoanalysis, to highlight the emotional investment of subjects in

their subject positions within symbolic order. He argues that "the subject cathects the ideological construction to which he or she has been subjected," and "invests psychic energy in the object world and in the characteristics of the self which the ideology has constructed."\textsuperscript{56} Identities are \textit{given} by symbolic orders, but they are also taken up in a very active sense by individuals. This is because individuals are agents and bring to the symbolic world species-specific characteristics and individual histories involving a complex of identifications, attributes, phantasy entanglements and so on. Thus psychic investment and tension pervades the symbolic order, and alteration of that order impacts directly upon individuals, provoking resistance, anger, rage, despair, but also the possibility of personal transformation.

One of Cash's central claims is that ideology is not simply thematic but structural, "with determinate modes of organisation and with its own rules of reproduction and transformation."\textsuperscript{57} In order to fill out this claim, he develops a novel account of the \textit{structuration} of ideology, pulling out and highlighting the unconscious cognitive and affective "rules" underpinning ideological orders. Cash's ideological rules are understood in Giddens' sense as structural properties drawn upon by subjects in order to "go on" in social life, which organise ideologies as systems in which reality is conceived and perceived, and intersubjective relations—the carving up of social life between identities both individual and group—are conducted. But Cash's position on rules departs from that of Giddens in two significant ways. Firstly Cash argues that Giddens' rules are so general and abstract that they provide us with very little purchase when studying social life; therefore Cash specifies a set of rules which are recursively drawn upon in an ideological formation. Secondly, Giddens' rules of structuration are conscious, sometimes discursively, more often at the level of what Giddens terms "practical consciousness." By contrast Cash's rules are primarily unconscious. Cash emphasises that there is a dynamic relationship between the unconscious and consciousness manifest in all areas and at all times in social life. This departs considerably from Giddens' understanding of the role of the unconscious in social life.


\textsuperscript{57}John Cash, \textit{Identity, Ideology and Conflict}, p. 70
within his structuration theory. For Cash, the unconscious rules are not simply drawn upon in moments of crisis, but infuse institutions, political ideologies and the understandings necessary for everyday conduct. The precedence for such an understanding can be found in the whole of Freud’s own work on everyday life and psychological phenomena.\(^{58}\)

It is the notion of affective rules that I want to emphasise here, leaving to one side the interesting account of cognitive rules that equally informs Cash’s approach. For his affective rules Cash draws upon the work of Melanie Klein and her followers, specifically the psychological processes involved in the depressive and the paranoid-schizoid positions. This I think is a particularly fruitful turning to psychoanalysis in order to explain the emotional involvement of subjects in ideology, as Cash’s study of the political crisis in Northern Ireland bears out. Cash develops three psychodynamic positions operative within ideological formations: the dehumanising and the persecutory positions, reflecting different features of Klein’s paranoid-schizoid position; and the ambivalent position, reflecting and drawing upon Klein’s depressive position.\(^{59}\) These involve a set of unconscious rules drawn upon in the apprehension of political and social life. I take a similar approach in chapter 4 where I outline the affective structures of the two modes of settler-nationalism.

The nation as social institution is among other things a social defence system. Drawing on the psychoanalytic group theory of Elliott Jacques and Isabel Menzies Lyth, Cash has explained that social institutions and their cultural mechanisms are “media for the binding of depressive and paranoid anxieties.” In other words individuals make use of social institutions as defences against anxiety. Jacques argued that “one of the primary cohesive elements binding individuals into institutionalised human association is that of defence against psychic anxiety.” It was not only that; other functions included “the equally important expression and

\(^{58}\)For a discussion of Giddens’ concept of rules, and Cash’s critique, see Identity, Ideology and Conflict, ch. 3. See also J. B. Thompson, Studies in the Theory of Ideology. Cash himself cites Thompson’s work as providing a related critique of Giddens’ too general account of rules.

\(^{59}\)Cash, Identity, Ideology and Conflict, p. 80.
Gratification of libidinal impulses in constructive social activities, as well as social co-operation in institutions providing creative, sublimatory opportunities.”\textsuperscript{60} But this understanding of the defensive nature of institutions adds another dimension to the emotional intensity with which identities are fought over, and particularly with responses to change. For if Jacques, Menzies Lyth and following them Cash, are correct in arguing that institutions perform the function of defending members against psychotic anxiety, then changes or threatened change to an institutional form, including a national form, are likely to unleash anger, fear and despair as the particular fusing of individual and social form breaks down. Jacques argued that this was one of the important reasons “for the intractability to change of many social stresses and group tensions.” This could often be explained as “the ‘resistances’ of groups of people unconsciously clinging to the institutions that they have, because changes in social relationships threaten to disturb existing social defences against psychotic anxiety.”\textsuperscript{61}

The nation as institution, and the national identity it instantiates, involves a certain historically achieved alignment of the phantasy lives of those individuals who reside within it. As Menzies Lyth has put it:

A social defence system develops over time as the result of collusive interaction and agreement, often unconscious, between members of the organization as to what form it shall take. The socially structured defence mechanisms then tend to become an aspect of external reality with which old and new members of the institution must come to terms.\textsuperscript{62}


\textsuperscript{62}Isabel Menzies Lyth, “The functioning of social systems as a defence against anxiety”, (1959), 1988, p. 51.
Jacques emphasised defences and a socially coordinated series of object relations which allow the expression of parts of the self that are denied and split off. These he called the phantasy social relations, and these existed, unconsciously, in relationship with a set of analytically distinguishable manifest social relations. A change in the structure of one did not necessarily rely upon or orient to a change in the other. The phantasy social relations underpinning Australian settler-nationalism were historically centred upon the conception of whiteness. The history of the formation of the national community as white—the road that nationalism and the very formation of the nation-state took in Australia—is of continuing importance to understanding political relations between settler and indigenous communities in the twentieth century. I examine this history in the next chapter.
Chapter Two: White Nation

The desire for and belief in a “white Australia” was the dominant expression of Australian settler-nationalism from its beginnings in the nineteenth century and for a large part of the twentieth century. “White Australia” encoded many meanings, and worked as a unifying ideology for otherwise disparate and conflicting interests. It became in the late nineteenth century the central symbol for the settler community that had claimed legitimate occupation of the Australian territories—a reality and an ideal to keep striving towards. Instantiated at the turn of the century as the White Australia Policy, and given effect by Immigration restriction acts and acts relating to citizenship, voting rights, and rights to social benefits, it was effective in the restriction of the growth of non-European, non-white populations in Australia for the long period of its operation until 1973.

From its inception in the middle of the nineteenth century white Australia was a paranoid nationalism, involving a split between the potential and realisable paradise within the Australian colonies, and the damaging, threatening, covetous otherness outside. The international climate became more unstable towards the end of the nineteenth century, with colonial expansion into the region by the French and the Germans, and the rise of Japan as a formidable nation-state; Australia’s status as an isolated European outpost seemed more precarious, and “a White Australia acquired the aura of an antipodean sanctuary.”¹ White Australia was at the same time a nationalist assertion of pride in the character of the Australian community. It was an expression of new world faith: Australia, by virtue of being free of the problems impacting on the old world—especially its mixtures of peoples or races existing within the same territories—had a unique chance to perfect its community through acts of careful social engineering. Australia was not going to be a “melting pot” nation like, for example, America. As far as possible it was going to be free of the racial conflict and division that had been the American and South African experience. By the late nineteenth

century Australian settler-nationalism had various examples of new world nationalism to reflect upon: those of New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and the United States of America. White nationhood was being tried out in other parts of the world. It was a “legitimate” and already established principle for cementing national unity by the time that it was adopted in Australia.² The Australian colonies had experienced their own racial conflicts—firstly the struggle to take the land from the indigenous and then, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, sporadic rioting against the Chinese on and in the vicinity of the goldfields, and the more continuous antagonism toward them. These examples from home, and the terrible civil war in America, proved for many the impossibility of different ‘races’ living peacefully within the same polity.

The powerful fantasy of harmony and democratic expansion through unity and purity of race stood at the heart of Australian settler-nationalism. It was progressivist. From the late nineteenth century, governments and their officials, scientists, professionals and members of humanitarian societies were inspired by a general faith in science and/or enlightened social engineering to mould the elements of society into a more coherent and well-functioning order. The progressivist movement in Australia, that developed late in the nineteenth century, was to have a major impact on policy and practice in the twentieth century; and nationalism, as Michael Roe has argued, was an important vehicle for the expression of progressivist passions and ideologies. Australian society was to be reformed through massive social programmes in the area of health (including racial health), social discipline and education. Those who would not bend to the progressivist will became “problem” individuals and “problem” groups.³

²Trainor points out that for the framing of the 1901-2 Immigration Restriction legislation Australians had examples of not only their own earlier colonial restrictions, but similar legislation from New Zealand, South Africa and Canada. British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism, p. 161. Andrew Markus in Fear and Hatred, 1979, compares anti-Chinese legislation of the Australian and the Canadian goldfields.

³Michael Roe, Nine Progressive Australians, 1984, p. 318, and passim. See also Zygmunt Bauman’s Legislators and Interpreters, 1987, which deals with the cultural professionals who sought to remake various peoples in the name of
Through the aid of legislation the governing bodies could maintain, control and even enhance the qualities of the national people. Moreover, the problem was still at a manageable stage. There were small populations of non-British peoples in the late 1800s—including Pacific Islander labourers in the North—small enough to be deported or so restricted in their activities that they would have little impact on the development of the nation and national character. The indigenous could be, and were, for the most part discounted as a diminishing problem: as a race they were dying. Or so it seemed to most people from about the 1860s.4 By the 1890s Melbourne’s The Age could editorialise:

The problem of Negro citizenship in the United states is given up by the philosopher as unsolvable. . . In Australia, fortunately, we are free from this race problem. The Aboriginals were of too low a stamp of intelligence and too few in number to be seriously considered. If there had been any difficulty, it would have been obviated by the gradual dying out of the native race. What we have to be afraid of is that, from our geographic position, we shall be overrun by the hordes of Asiatics.5

During the long debates on the Immigration Restriction Bill during 1901 and 1902, where politicians discoursed on their hopes and fears for their national community as a white Australia, the glaring absence of the Aborigines from the discussion can be explained not only by the nature of the debate—the indigenous were not immigrants who could be restricted—but also by the pervasiveness of this belief that they were doomed. One of the only mentions made of Aborigines was in Attorney General Alfred Deakin’s Second Reading Speech on the Bill:

4Such a view was widespread. See for example the comments of various speakers during Victoria’s Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines, 1858-1859.
5In The Age, 26th of September, 1896. Cited in Andrew Markus, Fear and Hatred, pp. 259-60.
We have power to deal with people of any and every race within our borders, except the aboriginal inhabitants of the continent, who remain under the custody of the States. There is that single exception of a dying race; and if they be a dying race, let us hope that in their last hours they will be able to recognize not simply the justice, but the generosity of the treatment which the white race, who are dispossessing them and entering into their heritage, are according them.⁶

The interaction between white and non-white identities was formative: the manner in which non-whites were imagined was an important feature of the very creation of a white Australian identity. Identities, as I argued in the previous chapter, are always formed in relationship to and with others. Images, perceptions, and reactions to these others were part of the dynamic symbolic system in which white identity was situated, and through which that identity emerged and was transformed over time. These others included the non-whites from other parts of the world, as well as Australia’s indigenous peoples. Despite the silence that often surrounded the latter, the reaction to them was an important impetus for the development of white Australia consciousness.⁷

The Chinese—or the less clearly defined “Asiatic”—loom large in any account of the rise of white Australia for obvious reasons; in the last decades of the nineteenth century, white Australia was most typically and explicitly articulated against negative images of the “Asiatic type”. The proximity of large populations of Asians seen as potentially covetous of the Australian continent was the stuff of nightmare for many white settlers, and the strident nationalism of white Australia was in important respects a defence against this fear.⁸ It was a complex fear. For some the Asiatic was the dangerous

⁷For the impact of images of savagery in general, and images of Australian Aborigines in particular, on the formation of British/Australian identity, see Ross Gibson, The Diminishing Paradise, 1984, ch. 5.
⁸William Lane’s novel “White or Yellow? A Story of the Race war of AD 1908”, published under the pseudonym “The Sketcher” and serialised in Brisbane’s The Boomerang between February and May 1888, is a powerful example of
other to be avoided at all costs. The presence of the Asiatic was polluting—contact, especially sexual contact, between “inferior” and “superior” “races” was always degrading for the latter. It brought the “superior” race down, and sapped their racial vitality. For others, the Asiatic was considered dangerous because on a similar level of the racial hierarchy to the white, and thus a competitor. The Chinese were widely perceived as an economic threat because of their industriousness, their cleverness, their business acumen, and their ability to live on meagre rations. For some in the settler community the very antiquity and formidable achievements of Chinese civilisation posed a threat to the new Australian civilisation; in their eyes, if the Chinese were allowed to migrate in any numbers the emerging Australian nation and its institutions would be unable to withstand the cultural thrust. Alfred Deakin argued that the Japanese had to be kept out “because of their high abilities”, a claim repeated by other parliamentarians debating the Immigration Restriction Bill of 1901-2. Other non-white peoples were similarly regarded as spoilers or potential spoilers of what had already been achieved. If they could be kept out, then peace, harmony and prosperity could continue to reign.

The influx of Chinese to the Australian gold fields and the political and cultural response to them, from the workers on the fields up to the political leaders of the colonies, is recognised by many as an important element of the ferment from which the explicit political movement for a white Australia emerged. Race consciousness was not, however, “produced” by the sudden influx of the Chinese. This point needs to be stressed, as it addresses a common misconception: that argument which draws attention to the supposed characteristics of non-whites and their communities, and particularly the way that they worked and behaved on the goldfields, as if this explained the settler reaction to them, and later

these invasion fears and the way that the Asiatic was demonised as national enemy. In Lane’s novel, the British capitalists joined forces with the “Asiatics” to undermine and destroy the workers’ democratic paradise.

8 See Myra Willard, History of the White Australia Policy to 1920, 1967 (1923), ch. 10. See also Helen Irving, To Constitute a Nation, 1997, p. 107.

the nationalist urge to keep them out. Though the numbers of Chinese who entered the colonies of New South Wales and Victoria increased spectacularly in the 1850s, this was not the cause of race consciousness. Restrictive immigration preceded by a few years the 1850s gold rushes. It was the desire to maintain a particularly “British-type” society, based on either implicit or explicit biological notions of race as the basis of particular forms of action, and institutional life, that stood behind the desire to build a white Australia. In one of his speeches at the Australasian Federation Conference of 1890, the “founding father” of federation, Henry Parkes, coined the famous nationalist phrase “The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all,” thus tying national unity to British ties of blood. The phrase became a catchcry, and was already considered “historic” by 1901. In another speech at this conference Parkes argued that it was “the duty of everyone to endeavour to preserve these Australian lands which were acquired according to the rights of nations, for a people modelled on the type of the British nation” and that it was “on that ground, and on that ground alone, that I have opposed the introduction of the Chinese.”

11 In a rehearsal of Russel Ward’s famous thesis, Hodges has argued that the Australian ethos only really became racist under the influence of the reaction to the Chinese on the goldfields: “The presence of the Chinese injected a new element, that of racism, into the developing ethos.” Eleanor Hodges “The Bushman Legend”, 1992, p. 9. See also N.B. Nairn “A Survey of the History of the White Australia Policy in the 19th Century,” 1956. Nairn argued that the revolutionaries from Europe, and the frontiersmen from America, who came to the goldfields held the more “politically inert and humiliated” Chinese in low regard, and could not see how they could contribute to building the new democratic society, pp. 21-4.

12 When the 1841 Immigration Committee in NSW ruled against the importation of indentured labour, a major reason given was the desire to maintain the ‘British character’ of the colony. This attitude prevailed despite labour shortages which were in part the result of the ending of convict transportation a year earlier. Kathryn A Manzo, Creating Boundaries, 1996, p. 177.


14 Henry Parkes speech, February 13, 1890, in Debates of the Australasian
these non-white others behaved—no matter how well they adapted themselves to British democratic institutions, for example—they were not and would not be wanted.

This sense of British superiority preceded the 1788 invasion, drawing on broad sources of influence, reflecting and building upon British and other European reaction to darker skinned peoples of the Americas, Africa and the Indian subcontinent in preceding centuries. The British conquerors brought with them to Australia a wealth of philosophical and literary explanation, aesthetic views, myths, and images of themselves and of other peoples. These imaginative frameworks included conceptions of Aborigines and Aboriginality dating back to the early seventeenth century, when the first reported sightings of Australian Aborigines were made by European explorers like William Jansz, Luis Vaez de Torres, Jan Carstenz, and Abel Janszoon Tasman.\textsuperscript{15} By 1788 the imaginative frameworks contained competing images of “savage” life—on the one hand images of natural nobility, on the other of wretchedness and brutality. It was the latter view that was to become dominant among Australian settlers, though the former persisted both in England and among some settlers. During the course of the nineteenth century, the negative view of Aboriginality hardened and altered from one of environmental to biological or race determination.

Race was the central category through which Australian nationality came to be understood.\textsuperscript{16} “Australia” became after federation in 1901 a nation-state that defined itself explicitly in white racial terms. The new democratic society, according to its own ideology, secured its egalitarian principle by adhering to British

\textit{Federation Conference of 1890}, 1990. The quotes are from pp. 221-2.


\textsuperscript{16}Trainor notes that the evidence of the newspapers of the 1890s shows the overwhelming influence of race as the prism through which many domestic and international issues were viewed. Typically, white racial identity was seen as potentially embattled by coloured or Asiatic identities. See \textit{British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism}, ch. 13.
traditions and institutions, and by maintaining “racial unity”. For many, racial unity meant racial purity, sustained by the belief that purity would lead to national greatness, and impurity to national disintegration. Given the importance of race to conceptions of white identity, some consideration of the historical development of racism, and of its interaction with Australian settler-nationalism, is appropriate at this point.

Racism and Australian Settler-Nationalism

Racism is a complex phenomenon, drawing on a long history of religious, philosophical and scientific thought, and views of different peoples constructed and absorbed from a wide variety of sources including literature, travelogues and journals of exploration. It is tied in intricate ways to: imperial expansion, colonisation and slavery; modern developments in science; the massive changes wrought by capitalism and the Enlightenment since the fifteenth century; the formation of nation-states and the development of new forms of state practices (including those concerned with the management of people); and the emergence of national consciousness.

Throughout history groups have thought about who they were by virtue of images of, and relations with, ‘others.’ Though there is evidence to suggest that even in ancient times forms of racism were occasionally applied when thinking about other peoples,¹⁷ racism assumed a modern and more pervasive form during and after the eighteenth century, largely emerging out of European thought and colonial oppression. In understanding the emergence of modern racism some theorists have pointed to the secularisation or disenchantment of the West, and of the related rise of a “mechanistic” world view. This broad shift had important implications for the development of different sciences, releasing them from biblical strictures. The study of animal, plant and human life—which came to be known as biology—and the systems of classification produced out of such study, was central to the development of racism. Some authors have argued that racism is a part of the rationalization process that Max Weber saw as the

underlying central feature of modernity. The processes of
distantiation/bureaucratization, of making things abstract, codifying
social life into smaller maneuverable and modifiable units, that
Weber analysed, made racism possible.\textsuperscript{18}

One of the prominent intellectual obsessions of Europeans in the
eighteenth century had been the problem of physical differences
between people and how these could be explained. The age of
exploration and expansion had intensified this concern. Yet religion,
especially Christianity, still fundamentally shaped European views
of non-European others in the eighteenth century; there was a need
to reconcile physical and cultural differences between peoples with
the Biblical/Judeo-Christian doctrine of the descent of humanity
from two common parents.\textsuperscript{19} Thus for theologists the Tower of Babel
and other biblical myths about the Canaanites or the sons of Ham
were used to explain the different appearances, and especially
colour differences, between peoples. For scientists in the eighteenth
century the unity of man was still sacrosanct; differences could be
explained by the impact of different environments. To argue for
different species of man, even in the late eighteenth century, could
be politically dangerous and opened one to the accusation of
atheism and blasphemy.\textsuperscript{20}

This began to change at the end of the eighteenth century, and
more rapidly in the nineteenth century, with race theories
developing alongside the development of biological science, and its
sub-branch physical anthropology. Other knowledges fed into
racism: aesthetics, and pseudo sciences like physiognomy,
craniology and phrenology were drawn upon by racist thinkers to
prove claims of inherent superiority and, later (i.e. as in Eugenics),
superior health of particular "races." In terms of the development of
racism one of the crucial doctrines that gained prominence in the
early decades of the nineteenth century was that of "polygenism",
which gradually came to replace "monogenism", and other popular

\textsuperscript{18}See David Theo Goldberg \textit{Racist Culture}, 1993, pp. 115-16; and Zygmunt

\textsuperscript{19}For a comprehensive account of the relationship between biblical and other
religious myths and racism, see Ivan Hannaford, \textit{Race: The History of an Idea
in the West}, 1996, ch. 4.

notions of the unity of the human species. Polygenism argued that the different races had emerged from distinct biological pools; thus the belief in the common parents of biblical lore was, for some thinkers, undermined. Though this theory did not necessarily stipulate the racial superiority of any one group, it was important mainly because, as Hannah Arendt has argued, it “arbitrarily isolated all peoples from one another by the deep abyss of the physical impossibility of human understanding and communication.” It also fueled the fear of miscegenation, since the “hybrids” formed through a mixing of races were not truly human beings as they did not belong to a single race; they were “a kind of monster whose ‘every cell is a theater of civil war.’”  

For some polygenists “full-blooded” negroes and other non-whites were not human either.  

A further development of racism came in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the rise of social Darwinism which superseded polygenism in public opinion. In the hands of some of its “scientific” practitioners this provided clearer, more direct, and firmer proof of a racial hierarchy, in which Europeans positioned themselves at the superior level. It entailed notions of progress and of the survival of the fittest, which were at once both a justification and an explanation for the experiences of imperialism. Moreover, it even gave a moral fervour to the active overthrowing of one “inferior” race by a “superior” one. This theory built on the older theory of the Great Chain of Being (which had its roots in Ancient Greece and reached its full flowering in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), and Linnaeus’ immense classificatory scheme. The Great Chain of Being and Linnaean classification had been embraced fervently by many intellectuals in the eighteenth century in their efforts to reintroduce system, order, and hierarchy during a period of turmoil and massive social upheaval. Under the influence of Christianity all human beings had tended to be set on the same level within the Great Chain, between beasts and Godly creatures as creations of God. But the widespread enthusiasm for the principles of fixity, gradation, hierarchy and natural order, entailed by the Great Chain in the late eighteenth century, laid the groundwork for the view of racial hierarchy embraced in the nineteenth century,

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once the view of the unity of man, and the explanation of creation in Genesis, came under sustained attack. Under the influence of revolutionary upheaval and the reaction to it, the debate on slavery which focussed attention on the character of the Negro, the search for the source of nationhood and for what held a given community together, and the development of science (especially biology and in the second half of the nineteenth century social Darwinism and eugenics), this understanding was transformed into the view of a hierarchy of biologically defined and fixed races.\textsuperscript{23}

Imperialism, which intensified as a system across the globe as the mood of expansionism gripped Europe in the late eighteenth century; the European experience in Africa and America; the immense struggle, conflict and moral dilemmas involved in the slave trade; all contributed to the transformation of the Enlightenment view of the “equality of all men” into the hierarchy of races. In this respect the argument concerning the link between the collapse of feudal society and the rise of racism has considerable explanatory power. The movement for equality and the “natural rights of man” proclaimed in the French and American revolutions, came hard up against the fact of imperial domination of “coloured” populations. Where feudal society could accommodate the repression of whole groups of people as belonging to categories within a hierarchy without recourse to a concept like race, the more open, and ostensibly less hierarchical, post-feudal society produced a compelling need to find arguments to support the repression of such categories of people—if such dominative social structures were to persist.\textsuperscript{24} The Enlightenment concern with rationality instantiated the subject of reason as the human subject. Rationality distinguished the human from the brute. The level of rationality

\textsuperscript{23} See Winthrop Jordan, \textit{White Over Black}, especially ch. 6; Gossett, \textit{Race: The History of an Idea in America}; Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}; and Robert Miles, \textit{Racism}, 1989, pp. 31-5. As Jordan wrote, it “was no accident that the Chain of Being should have been most popular at a time when the hierarchical arrangement of society was coming to be challenged”, \textit{White Over Black}, p. 228.

\textsuperscript{24}Louis Hartz articulated this idea in his \textit{The Founding of New Societies}, 1964. For use of the idea in the Australian context, see David G. Baker “Australian and Anglo Racism,” 1977.
could be inferred from the level of cultural and technological development—or civilization—achieved by a given people. Scales of humanity, as I argued above, had become widely accepted by the late eighteenth century. This opened the way, in the light of pervasive images and perceptions of other, usually conquered, coloured peoples, for even the key Enlightenment and liberal utilitarian thinkers to fall prey to the assumptions of racism when accounting for, and even justifying, the subjection and exploitation of other non-European peoples. The greatest happiness of the greatest numbers—the key axiom of utilitarians—meant something different when non-European peoples were added to the equation. Their happiness counted for less than that of their more rational and enlightened counterparts.25

Racism was embroiled in imperialism; it also came to the fore as both the justification for the brutal age of high imperialism, and as an explanation for the “shattering experience” of contact with black Africa. Hannah Arendt has argued that, if not for the terrible deeds of Europeans during the scramble for Africa, racial thinking might have evaporated from the European mind. But Europeans as moral beings had to find suitable justifications for their own brutality; to this end, the vision of racial superiority, and the perception of Africans as less than human, were irresistible and compelling temptations.26 The European flight from guilt, one might argue, exacerbated projective processes and European aggression; a guilt so powerful that it drove a vicious cycle of extreme idealisation of the European self, and denigration of non-European others.

The European experiences in Africa were shocking in other ways too. The “dark tribes” were somehow inexplicable and, from a European perspective, thoroughly degraded—a naked, godless Other. Blackness had symbolised evil, death and the satanic for centuries among Europeans. This chain of meaning was offloaded onto dark-skinned peoples; dark skin was for many Europeans repulsive, and reverberated with phantasies of sin, evil and uncontrolled impulses. Whiteness symbolised purity and restraint. Authors like Frantz Fanon and Joel Kovel, working from a psychoanalytically informed historical and social perspective, have argued that, for the European,

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these peoples represented an irreconcilable otherness that European culture had, over the course of centuries, suppressed within itself, and from which it sought to flee. At the same time, dark-skinned peoples represented, for the European, a state of instinctual freedom to which he or she unconsciously desired to “return.” “The civilized white man”, Fanon argued, “retains an irrational longing for unusual eras of sexual license, of orgiastic scenes, of unpunished rapes, of unrepresed incest.”27 A rigid division between the intellectual and the sexual in western cultures—most evident in puritanism—was reproduced in different form, in divisions between culture and nature, or civilization and savagery. White Europeans needed to believe in these divisions because of the peculiarity of their cultural development and instinctual renunciation.28 They projected their own fears of disintegration, of lapsing back into a “primitive state”, onto native others. Colonisers viewed the natives as hardly separable from nature at all, equating their, apparently, different relationship to nature with being not-quite-human—as if what defined being human was a vigorous separation from, and hostility towards, a nature that must be subdued and dominated.29

Racism provided emotional and identity certainty when all certainties had been undermined, during the period of massive upheaval in Europe and the colonised regions, from the fifteenth century onward. Moreover, and of pertinence to our specific discussion, the very emergence of racism was closely tied to the development of national consciousness.30 Mosse has argued that, especially in central Europe, “the language and history of the people was used to explore its racial origins, and the virtues of a race were ascribed to the qualities of its roots.” The sources for racism were always much deeper than the intellectual probings and postulations

27 Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, 1968, p.165.
29Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, p. 192.
30See Etienne Balibar “Racism and Nationalism”, 1991. He argues that the two are not the same, but that racism serves as “a supplement of nationalism or more precisely a supplement internal to nationalism, always in excess of it, but always indispensable to its constitution”; and always there ready to reorder nationalism in its own guise, p. 54.
of science. Races, like nations, were meant to have mythological and spiritual roots lost in the mists of time. Races, like nations, were timeless. Racists, though drawing sustenance from scientific explanations where these were useful, would never be held by scientific rigor. In the last decades of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century racism was, for some individuals and political movements, a mystical national religion.31

In explaining the adoption of race as the key category defining Australian national belonging, one might point to the timing of Australia’s “ascent” to nationhood. The Australian nation moved towards its political consolidation at exactly the time, in the late nineteenth century, when racism as an ideology was flourishing in Europe, and infusing important nationalist movements. Maintaining the physical and cultural integrity of a postulated “white race” took on an aspect of world historical importance for white intellectuals in Europe and America, and in the smaller colonial societies like Australia. The great achievements of British or European civilisation were considered proof of the superiority of a white race that stood at the head of world civilisation.

It would be wrong to assume, on the other hand, that white racism was simply imported into Australia as an intellectual movement deriving from Europe and its “great” racial thinkers and scientists. In many respects its specific Australian form derived from conditions inherent in colonial imperialism, emerging out of a system that sanctioned the removal of the indigenous from their lands in the name of colonial enterprise. Arendt argued that racism was “the main ideological weapon of imperialistic politics,”32 a point worth emphasising in any examination of the relations between settlers and Aborigines in Australia. Racism was important for European imperialism in Australia because it served to justify the exploitation of indigenous peoples and their lands, and even their eventual “extinction”. Despite movements within Britain and the Colonial Office to protect the indigenous—especially evident from the 1830s to the 1850s—the sporadic measures adopted were not allowed to stand in the way of the development of the land for capitalist purposes. Settler-colonialism, because it is based on the

31George L. Mosse, Towards the Final Solution, 1978, pp. 94-95. Quote at p. 94.
32The Origins of Totalitarianism, p. 160.
expropriation of land, is inseparable from racism. The act of expropriation is in itself racist because it refuses to recognise the rights to land of entire categories of people. The settler-colonial situation is thus an inherently racialised one; it is a powerfully lived relation between settler and native. Race theories, largely formulated in European colonial centres, thrived in this atmosphere.

The struggle over land with indigenous peoples was a major contributing factor in the hardening and strengthening of white race consciousness in Australia. Historians of early settlement, drawing upon contemporary sources like the diaries and letters of pioneers, and newspapers and literature, have shown how savage was the struggle over land in different regions of Australia, and its reverberations within the hearts and minds of colonisers. At times these struggles amounted to wars of extermination, most notably in Tasmania, but also in the other colonies, albeit on a lesser scale. Reading through some of this documentation, the hatred and fear, ridicule and dismissal of the indigenous is pervasive. This can be illustrated by considering one among many justificatory pamphlets and books written by colonisers.

Eldershaw's *AUSTRALIA, as it really is*,33 a series of reminiscences relating to northern New South Wales in the 1840s, was published in 1854; it contains a long account of a brutal massacre of Aborigines by settlers in supposed retaliation for the killing of four shepherds and the theft of sheep. The description of the attack on the tribe, most of whom were forced over a cliff, is written in a language of high drama, almost like a swashbuckling adventure—only that it depicts the indiscriminate killing of men, women and children, at times with disconcerting glee. The main strategy used in the narrative—in the attempt, one supposes, to divert our moral attention (and perhaps the writer's as well) from the tragedy and brutality of the massacre—is to compare the "savages" to wild beasts and other creatures, thus obliterating our empathy. As a coloniser, the depredations of "the blacks" warned him of "the imminent risks we were still daily incurring in these first efforts to people and subdue the solitude and savages of this vast wilderness" (p. 62). "Savages", presumably, did not count as

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33F. Eldershaw, *AUSTRALIA, as it really is, In its Life, Scenery, & Adventure*, 1854. Page numbers in brackets refer to this text.
people in that wilderness. Prefacing his long justification for the use of “salutary” measures against the natives, he argues that “our peaceful efforts to reclaim these wandering hordes were all delusive” (p. 63). The natives did not understand or appreciate kindness—like wild beasts they needed to be handled with brute force. As the narrative progresses, the natives gather up epithets connecting them with the animal and insect world: they are “quick and snake-like” with “fierce gleaming eyes” (p. 69); butchering and murderous “insatiate wretches” (p. 70). In his later notes on the Aborigines he pleads for indiscriminate slaughter as the squatters’ only defence against the ‘savages,’ especially in the vast majority of cases where one could not hope to bring the individual to justice:

As if it were possible to distinguish the particular murderer, although the deed was openly done before your eyes, among a tribe of equally hideous, naked, and bedaubed savages. As well might you look among that figurative collection of torments—a bag of fleas—for the particular insect which had especially troubled your night’s repose, as attempt thus to distinguish (p. 105).

Without explicitly denying them a human status he does everything to signal that they could not be human. Their situation, in his view, was hopeless. He found no evidence of their ever having achieved any higher form of culture in the past, or any possibility that they have the capacity to “move up” in the future: “you find them in a state of barbarism which seems incapable of improvement—below which it appears impossible to descend, and above which there is no trace or visible sign of their having ever existed. They seem to stand, as it were, alone—stationary in their primitive barbarism—and in their career (whatever period may be assigned to it) to have experienced neither advancement nor retrogression—improvement nor degeneration” (p. 79). Fixed race categories are implied—Aboriginal inferiority, their debased state, was biological, and their actions arose from a low level of instinct. They are, he argues, devoid of religion, have no conception of a higher being, a state which indicates to him that they are lacking in “one of the most natural impulses of the mind” (p. 95), and that “their dull and grovelling minds have not even room for one such aspiration” (p. 96). He argues that “little or no affection appears to exist among
them, and social laws are evidently to a great extent dispensed with" (p. 96). They have a “natural ferocity” and an “indifference for others’ sufferings” (p. 97). They are, in fact, so low on the scale of civilization that they could not even be compared with the barbarians of ancient times. They had none of the “savage nobleness, and sensitive intelligence, so eminent in the North American Indian, or the New Zealander.” What was even more damning in his eyes was their apparent inability to comprehend the nature of their “superiors”, the white conquerors. In this respect they compared unfavourably even with the lower animals:

... they have not even enough of instinctive comprehension, (possessed generally by the inferior animals) to be awed by or to admire the cool and collected courage of a superior adversary (pp. 100-1).

His idealisation of the noble, courageous white man, in this passage and elsewhere, in comparison with the murderous, inhuman and cowardly “savages”, is evidence of the operation of that extreme splitting Melanie Klein described as characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position. Indeed, the book seems to be written in an atmosphere of growing paranoia, anger and resentment at the attempts by various authorities and humanitarian groups to set up regimes of protection which, in his view, would leave the settler at the mercy of natives who knew no bounds to their savagery.

During phases of pastoral expansion, which occurred at different times in different parts of the country, extending from the early nineteenth through the early twentieth centuries, a logic of extermination of the indigenous gripped whole communities.34

34G.A. Robinson, for example, reports in his journal the comments of the master of a ship he travelled on in 1829, on a visit to Maria Island off the coast of Tasmania to see if an Aboriginal settlement could be formed there:

[He] took every occasion to vilify the aborigines as a useless race, a nuisance upon the earth, reptiles who ought to be extirpated, worthless wretches, and similar shameful epithets (p. 84).

As other entries in his journal indicate, reporting on conversations he had with settlers in and around Tasmania, such views were fairly typical at the time. For examples, see p. 89, and his letter to his wife, dated 10 of October 1830, at footnote 6, p. 435. See N.J.B. Plomley (ed.) Friendly Mission: The
White race consciousness, and the articulation of exterminatory desires towards the indigenous, were not confined to those involved in direct conflict on the frontier. Because the prosperity of the colonies was so closely tied to the success of the expansion of the pastoral industry, the desire to cancel out the competing moral claim to land was a powerful stimulus to the embracing of racist views of the indigenous, on a society-wide basis. Bernard Smith noted the curious phenomenon that as European reactions to Australia became, after 1820, in general more favourable, reactions to Aborigines became less favourable. In the new Australian Eden the only debased thing was the savage, predatory, unpredictable Aborigine.\(^{35}\) This needs to be understood as a dynamic relation. At the time when squatters were pushing out beyond the frontiers of settlement, from the 1820s onwards, and meeting with Aboriginal resistance, Aborigines were an obstacle that stood in the way of the dreams of development and progress involved in the bending of nature to the British will. Dispossession needed to be justified. Aborigines became the shocking jest on nature and humanity at exactly the time when a careful consideration of their moral and property rights would have hindered more powerful interests.\(^{36}\)

\(^{35}\)Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, 1768-1850, 1969, pp. 202-3. Describing his experiences and travels in the English-speaking world during 1866 and 1867, Charles Dilke had this to say about attitudes towards the indigenous:

Nothing will persuade the rougher class of Queensland settlers that the “black-fellow” and his “jin” are human. They tell you freely that they look upon the native Australian as an ingenious kind of monkey. . .

In Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Greater Britain*, (1869) 1872, p. 357.

\(^{36}\)R.H.W. Reece argues that there is evidence to suggest that, especially after the arrests in July 1838 of those involved in the Myall Creek Massacre, “the squatting interest attempted to lessen the seriousness of killing Aborigines by denying their humanity”. He provides examples from newspapers of the time. See *Aborigines and Colonists*, 1974, pp. 93, 103. M. Hartwig argued that the squatters were the most likely to deny the Aborigines their humanity, and engaged in the most virulent forms of racism. See “Aborigines and Racism: An Historical perspective”, 1972, pp. 12-13.
Conceptions of race, whether based on commonsense beliefs, "experience", folklore, science or a combination of all, were central in organising the clear demarcation between settler and indigenous communities, from the days of early contact. These conceptions changed over time and under the influence of different pressures and forces. More articulate notions of race were operative from at least the early part of the nineteenth century with regard to the indigenous, though they did not gain scientific sanction—they were also transformed and hardened by science—until later in the century. Earlier and later forms of white racial ideology acted at once as a justification for the traumatic process of dispossessing the indigenous, and were embroiled in that ongoing process. As early as the 1840s one can find public utterances in parliaments, newspapers, and in journals which indicate that forms of racism were used as ideological justification for the process of the colonisation of Australia, and the replacement of Aborigines as a people, by a "finer" white race.\textsuperscript{37}

The notion of a white race was expressed in complex and at times contradictory forms. Historians, philosophers, scientists and an array of popularisers of racist theories used mythic race categories—Aryan, Anglo-Saxon, Nordic or Teutonic—to support arguments about white racial superiority, in ways that excluded and included various European populations. The myth of Anglo-Saxondom was especially attractive in the Australian colonies because of its mythic association with Britain. Though the idea of a pure Anglo-Saxondom did not really take a racial form until the

\textsuperscript{37}Many examples can be found in Jean Woolmington’s excellent selection of documents, *Aborigines in Colonial Society*, 1973. See especially the reported comments from the debates in the New South Wales Legislative Council in 1844 and 1849, on Bills to admit unsworn testimony from Aborigines in the courts, where images of the Aborigines as a degraded, unintelligent race were oft repeated, pp. 144 ff. See also reported comments in J.D. Mulvaney “The Australian Aborigines 1606-1929: Opinion and Fieldwork, Part 1: 1606-1859,” 1957, especially those of the Victorian magistrate William Hull, p. 144. Hull commented at Victoria’s *Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines, 1858-1859* that the dying out of Victoria’s Aborigines was the work of Divine Providence replacing an inferior with a finer race, and that nothing should be done to prolong the process, pp. 9-12.
nineteenth century, the myth itself had a long history, dating back to sixteenth and seventeenth century English beliefs about the purity of the Anglo-Saxon church and the secular myth of the free nature of Anglo-Saxon political institutions, and had for long been important as a source of communal pride and self-esteem. The writing of history in the eighteenth century had paved the way for transforming the idea of the success of Anglo-Saxon institutions, into one which took Anglo-Saxon blood as being the main reason for that success. The development of the Aryan myth, in the middle of the nineteenth century, transformed the Anglo-Saxon myth: freedom loving Anglo-Saxons became the racially powerful and destined Aryan people. German philologists, through studies of the linguistic roots of English and German languages, claimed that both peoples stemmed from a common root. The argument was that the Aryans of India—the “forebears” of the Anglo-Saxons—impelled by an irresistible force, began to migrate westward. They brought with them qualities of self-reliance and independence as a direct result of the migration, which became the key features of the German and English peoples.38 Thus institutional superiority as well as revolutionary and expansionary success were given a perceived biological basis, and became racial superiority.39

In late nineteenth century Australia one prominent form of justification for exclusive white colonisation involved a form of “clash of civilisations” ideology, based on the racial theory of writers like the French nobleman Gobineau and the Scottish anatomist Robert Knox.40 The world was divided between competing civilisations. “White peoples”, represented in Australia by British settlers, were pitted against “Negroid”, “Coloured”, “Oriental” or “Asiatic” peoples, for control of the world’s land and other resources.


39 For a discussion of the history of the Anglo-Saxon myth, which I have drawn upon in the above, see Reginald Horsman, Race and Manifest Destiny, 1981, pp. 1-24, and also Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America, 1997, ch. XIII.

40 On Knox’s thesis that race was everything and civilisation depended totally on it, see Mosse, Towards the Final Solution, pp. 67ff. Knox published his most famous book, Races of Men in 1850.
White race consciousness dictated that land like Australia was needed for the "white race" in order to continue its development as a civilisation. In a text written to celebrate the centenary of European settlement and published in 1888, the historian Alexander Sutherland, reflecting upon the ethical questions raised by colonisation, wrote of an Anglo-Saxon race which, in accordance with a mixture of divine and natural laws, had supplanted Australia's natives:

...the fact is that mankind, as a race, cannot choose to act solely as moral beings. They are governed by animal laws which urge them blindly forward upon tracks they scarce can choose for themselves. If it is a divine law that the Anglo-Saxon people must double themselves every half-century, it must be a divine law that they are to emigrate and form for themselves new homes in waste lands. But every spot suitable for man's sustenance is held by some sort of human occupant; and, therefore, the Anglo-Saxon cannot choose but intrude upon the haunts of other races. ...In obedience to natural laws over which they had no control, seeing that they would not and could not brain their infants as the Australians did, the Anglo-Saxons sought these lands, and settled side by side with the natives.

Population pressures in England therefore justified the settling of lands and forests where "savages" merely wandered and hunted. He argued that even if it meant the complete disappearance of Aboriginal blood, settlement was justified by the alleviation of the sufferings of Anglo-Saxons in the crowded cities of England, and in any case simply conformed to "a law above that which man makes for himself"; exhibiting a curious sniff of pseudo scientific notions

41 An extract from Sutherland's book Victoria and Its Metropolis, from which I have quoted, is contained in Henry Reynolds' Dispossession: Black Australians and White Invaders, pp. 10-11. See also Pearson's important and influential text National Life and Character, first published in 1893. In this book he devotes a long section to consideration of the suitability of various geographical locations and climates for the perpetuation of different races, concluding that there were not many areas that were truly suitable for white settlement. Interestingly, Australia is cited as a land peculiarly suited to
of “the survival of the fittest”, and religious notions of the divine plan.

White Australia

The choice of “white Australia” as the central unifying element and symbol of the new nation in the last decades of the nineteenth century was, therefore, neither accidental nor simply an instrumental choice made by political leaders and nationalists. On the contrary, it grew from historical, social, and political conditions, it drew on a number of sources, and it provided a resolution of tensions between colonial identities. It reflected perceptions of the region in which the new settler society emerged, and specified how that society was to engage with the region and forge its place within it. It was a response to the distance of that society from its historical and cultural roots. It emerged from the nature of the population as markedly British, and gave expression to the unifying processes which had led to the diminishment of the cultural and geographic differences of the colonies. It expressed a race consciousness that had been fermenting in Australian conditions, but that also had its sources in European history and intellectual life. It expressed that view of nationhood which emphasised the importance of blood or kinship ties.

The British brought with them to Australia a sense of national identity that had been forged over the two preceding centuries.42

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42 See Liaj Greenfeld, who makes a similar argument for national identity in America in her Nationalism—Five Roads to Modernity, 1992, ch. 5; and Richard Helgerson, who argues in Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England, 1992, that a restless generation of creative spirits, born between 1551 and 1564—writers such as Spenser, Coke, Camden, Speed, Drayton, Hakluyt, Shakespeare and Hooker—created an English national identity, in a n
Thus Australian nationalism had its initial grounding in British nationalism. In saying this I do not mean to play down or ignore significant class, status (free or convict), communal, ethnic or national differences that existed beneath the broader British identity of the colonies. These were real, as were the divisions and rivalries between the colonies. However, as a colonising people, the unity of purpose in the act of developing a new land, and in taking that land from a clearly demarcated other (the indigenous), led to the weakening of those divisions and the strengthening and development of a common identity.

Anglo-Saxondom or Britishness—the two terms could be used interchangeably—represented an overarching civilisation within which white Australians could stake out their own specific national claim. Settler Australians in the process of forming their nation needed, nevertheless, to articulate their own symbols of unity in order to convince themselves that they formed a distinct society: British derived but not simply British, a society and a culture, a nation of their own. The myth of Australian nationhood could rely in part on the myths invigorating the British nation, but these could not serve the purpose of distinguishing the Australian nation as a new entity in the world. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, as nationalism became more culturally and politically articulate, the symbol “white Australia” was used to embrace the new continentally unified people.

“White Australia” had an advantage as a symbol over an Anglo-Saxon Australia because it could garner broad appeal across the classes and among people of differing levels of education, and, just as importantly, among those with a differing sense of national attachment. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon myth which drew on a wealth of complex European history, white Australia could be understood and embraced by everyone. White Australia did not question the loyalty of Imperial patriots to Britain, nor suggest that the basic loyalties of local patriots should lie with Britain. It was a thoroughly democratic symbol, which could appeal across the social and political spectrum. Moreover, it could smooth over national differences, most notably between the English, the Scots and the

imagined sense, during the sixteenth century. See especially his introduction and chs. 5 & 6.
Irish; the latter for example, could be excluded from the Anglo-
Saxon myth, but included as white Australians.\textsuperscript{43}

White Australia united otherwise disparate and competing
interests. In this respect it was a powerful nationalist symbol and
ideology. Through white Australia these different interests could
unite as if they were all guided by the same purpose, while they
could believe, at the same time, that they were pursuing their
independent aims. The role of the labour movement is illustrative.
On the whole it supported white Australia, and could at the same
time see itself as defeating the agents of capital who, in importing
cheap non-white labour, would have reduced them to the level of
the despised Asiatic indentured labourers.\textsuperscript{44} A white Australia also
enhanced its sense of pride: even workers were members of the
white race, superior to all other peoples. As David Roediger has
argued for America, in Australia’s often harsh working class
conditions the “pleasures of whiteness” functioned as a “wage for
white workers,”\textsuperscript{45} beyond economic benefits. The “dignity of
labour”\textsuperscript{46} was perhaps the most important meaning of white

\textsuperscript{43}A similar case can be shown for the USA at the turn of the nineteenth
century and in the early twentieth century. Theodore Roosevelt for example,
who was of Dutch ancestry, avoided the use of the term “Anglo-Saxon” for
obvious personal reasons, but also because non-Anglo Americans, of which
there were many, felt excluded from it. What he did instead was to cultivate
an image or myth of an American race, and then gave it all the attributes of
dynamism, energy and manifest destiny that others had attributed to Anglo-
318-20.

\textsuperscript{44}Robin Gollan noted the strong agitation of the labour movement against any
form of coloured labour, and the way that this quickly became a key theme in
working class nationalism. The Australian Labor Party, from its inception,
was at the forefront of the fight to keep Australia pure, and spearheaded the
drawing of the link between racial purity and nationalism in Australia. See
\textit{Radical and Working Class Politics}, ch. 11. See also Carlotta Kellaway “‘White

\textsuperscript{45}David R. Roediger, \textit{The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the
consciousness in Australia is inspired by his argument.

Australia for the working classes; such dignity had to be defined against indignity. The hard working indentured labourers were slaves; the Chinese were servile labourers who worked too diligently and lived in degraded conditions. Their servile nature was exemplified by their capacity and willingness to live in appalling conditions, which no ‘decent’ white worker would tolerate. Aborigines, where they were used for labour, were rarely paid at all. The freedom of Aboriginal life, potentially desired by workers, could be denigrated by strictly separating white workers from them. Aborigines were seen as lazy, destitute, immoral, as against white workers who looked after each other, and who worked hard. The formation of this consciousness had a long historical development, dating back to the convict days.

The status and privilege conferred on belonging to a white race acted as a powerful salve for the humiliations of an exploitative class system. Belonging to a white race gave to workers a sense of dignity which they otherwise lacked in their dependency on the exigencies of capitalist markets. It also compensated for the pressures of social discipline involved in working for capitalism. In certain cases the compensations were even more direct. In the Northern tropical regions white workers could live like other colonials ordering Aboriginal servants about, sexually exploiting Aboriginal women, allowing themselves more leisure and an easier home life by limiting their domestic work; a privilege only enjoyed by the middle and upper classes in other regions of Australia.

To the extent that Australian nationalism in its early phases relied upon a myth of a national type—a combination of notions of whiteness, maleness, mateship (or social solidarity), egalitarianism, courage and so on—it drew heavily on the culture of the lower classes, on ‘the average man.’ At the level of community, the myth translated into the advanced social ideals and democracy pioneered by the Australian people. Social welfare, decent wages and living conditions, have been important features of this. But from early on, and until the latter part of the twentieth century, these notions were so intricately linked with the notion of a white Australia as to be inseparable. “Non-white aliens” were to be kept out at all costs, including the cost of the retardation of economic development; and within Australia, most prominently, indigenous peoples were to be excluded from the benefits of the social welfare state.
The major democratic and social welfare initiatives which Australia pioneered, and which the labour movement played an important role in achieving, were to be protected by the purity of race. Thus in the early federation when the new Australian Labor Party thrashed out its vision for Australia, it was clearly racially based. At its interstate conference of 1905, the following platform was adopted as a Labor Party objective:

The cultivation of an Australian sentiment based on the maintenance of racial purity and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community.\(^4\)

It was a clear conviction that the enlightened and self-reliant community hung on its racial purity.

Workers advocated the protection of a form of garrison white state of privilege and democratic achievement in a region perceived as hostile to the level of those achievements. The pragmatism involved in this strategy should not blind us to the equally important currents of ethnocentrism and virulent racism informing the development of this brand of working class consciousness. One only need consider the option, not really given consideration by the labour movement until the middle of the twentieth century, of a more inclusive approach which would have seen the protection of those conditions by the drawing in of "alien elements," to understand this. The answer to why this practice was not given serious consideration by the labour movement is complex, but at an important level lies in the relationship between class formation, ethnic boundary maintenance, ethnocentrism and full-blown racism in Australian conditions. This is perhaps clearest when considering "alien labour", but it was also important for the labour movement's response to Aborigines.

With some exceptions time and time again the labour movement was hostile to the use of Aboriginal labour.\(^4\) As with imported


\(^4\)One of these important exceptions was the AWU in the 1890s, which debarred many non-whites but permitted Maories, Negroes and Aborigines to join. See A.T. Yarwood and M.J. Knowling, *Race Relations in Australia*, 1982, p. 230. For a general account of the ACTU's (formed in 1927) relationship and long time support of the White Australia Policy, see Frank Farrell.
labour, indentured or otherwise, Aboriginal labour could be cheaper, but it was not always so. Why the labour movement, including trade unions and the various branches of the Labor Party, did not fight more strenuously to improve the conditions of Aboriginal labour rather than seek its exclusion can only be explained by the growth of white racist working class consciousness. The lack of solidarity between white and Aboriginal workers in the North, North West and Central regions of Australia, where Aboriginal labour was important in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is a damning indictment of the labour movement's otherwise strong reformist credentials. Aborigines were frequently deemed unfair competitors for labour, who should be given only secondary preference wherever they came into conflict with white labour, even if this meant, as it so often did, condemning Aborigines to extreme levels of poverty which should have been seen as a national blight on a country celebrating its high standard of living. When white rural labourers returned from the goldfields Aborigines were often pushed out of the jobs they had taken up in their absence. When depressions led to scarcity of jobs, trade unions generally pushed for exclusion of Aboriginal labour. The case for such discrimination in favour of the white working class was strengthened symbolically by the vision of white Australia agreed upon at federation. The country was for the white man, so the white man should be given first preference wherever the potential for conflict with Aboriginal labour surfaced.

Concluding Remarks
There have been many attempts to sanitise what white Australia meant. Authors have argued that it was not really about colour or race in the first instance, but rather about a way of life—democratic, anti-authoritarian, and egalitarian, with decent working and living conditions—that needed to be protected. White Australia, so this argument goes, really stood not for skin colour but for all those other ‘civic virtues’; it became a symbol for the protection of what was, by historical and international standards, a society and a way of life highly worth preserving.49 The danger in adopting such a

"International Solidarity?" 1978.

49See Myra Willard, A History of the White Australia Policy to 1920; K.M. Dallas
view is that one will miss the important underlying racial phantasies that have driven Australian nationalism. White Australia encoded specific ideas and phantasies about what held a nation together. It encapsulated not only the hopes and dreams of settler-nationalists, but their most potent fears and hatreds. This *style of imagining* of political community had important implications for those people who were not white: all efforts were made to exclude them, and where they could not be excluded from the territory, they would not be regarded, or treated, as fully-fledged citizens of the white national democracy.

The rich fantasy underbelly of white Australia, that included an elaborate race ideology as well as concepts of civic virtue, democracy, egalitarianism and freedom, is not only of historic interest; it is the background, and at times the stumbling block, to efforts in the latter part of this century to reorient national identity away from notions of race. Its influence is still evident in the expressions of fear and rage from those in the white settler community who feel that the form of their nation is being deliberately altered: “Asianised” or made “artificially” multicultural. It is also of considerable importance when trying to understand and explain the political relations between the settler and indigenous communities, well into the twentieth century. In the next chapter I examine the relationship between white Australia and the policy of assimilation of the indigenous embraced by Australian governments between the 1930s and the 1960s.

Chapter Three: Aboriginal Strangers in National Space—the Absorption and Assimilation Policies.

If Australia is to be a country fit for our children and their children to live in, we MUST KEEP THE BREED PURE. The half-caste usually inherits the vices of both races and the virtues of neither. Do you want Australia to be a community of mongrels?

—(Editorial in *The Bulletin*, 1901.)

In this chapter I examine the way that white Australia nationalism shaped government policies of absorption and assimilation from the late 1930s to the early 1960s. In doing so I highlight the racist and settler-nationalist imperatives that frequently stood behind such policies. I argue that one of the ongoing motivations for assimilation was related to the nationalist message entailed in white Australia: the need to preserve the link between race and nation, and to avoid the development of ethnic or cultural difference within the boundaries of the nation-state. A less critical view of the motives standing behind assimilation is that it was driven by certain unavoidable imperatives specific to all modernising liberal democracies, and to the activities and functions of the modern state as the central organising agency of those societies. This argument sees assimilation primarily as a measure concerned with the duties of a democratic society (or nation) towards its citizens; society provides citizens with a certain level of social welfare, (i.e., health, housing, education, wealth and so on),\(^2\) as a form of incremental inclusion based on a concept of equality. In this respect, assimilation might be considered a feature of that process of cultural homogenisation both inevitable and essential, in Ernest Gellner's

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view, for the good functioning of a modern industrial society. I suggest in this chapter that, while such imperatives were always to some extent standing behind the state imposition of assimilation regimes, they do not account fully for actions directed at the indigenous.

Zygmunt Bauman, in a general critique of the modern nation-state’s social engineering efforts, has referred to “liberal assimilation” as an anthropophagic process of “annihilating . . . strangers by devouring them and then metabolically transforming [them] into a tissue indistinguishable from one’s own”. This, he argues, is driven by a paranoid fear of the danger of strangers; in modernity, the presence of strangers evokes fears about the breakdown of societal order, and the onset of chaos. The alternative, and frequently complementary, state strategy was anthropoemic: “vomiting” strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world, barring them from communication with those inside, or, as a last resort, destroying them physically.3 Assimilation, from this perspective, replaces physical violence with symbolic violence.

Aboriginal “strangers” threatened the boundaries drawn around the white nation; the response to that threat, as settler-Australia moved into the twentieth century and away from the physical violence of the frontier, was to dispose with that strangeness through processes of cultural transformation. Assimilation, thus, involved complex motives; many of these were less honourable than the defenders of assimilation claim. While there was an important reparative trend—doing something to “uplift” those who had been neglected at best, and treated appallingly at worst, by the Australian nation—there was also a destructive trend, responding to paranoid and persecutory fears concerning the future of the white nation. The policies that encouraged the taking of Aboriginal children from their parents, operating under both protection and assimilation regimes, were never simply motivated by the concern

3Zygmunt Bauman, “The making and Un-making of Strangers”, 1997. Quote at p. 18. See also Life in Fragments, 1995, pp. 179-82, where Bauman points out that in Tristes Tropiques Levi-Strauss divided the anthropophagic and anthropoemic strategies for dealing with “danger-carrying strangers”, between primitive on the one hand and modern societies on the other. Bauman argues, against Levi-Strauss, that, in fact, all societies engage in both processes; they were complementary strategies (p. 180).
of the state to give neglected children a better chance in life, even where evidence for such a concern can be found; white Australia played a role here too. For some, the ultimate aim was to break down Aboriginal separateness, and the hope was, often, that the stolen children would forget about their Aboriginality, eventually marry white people, and produce through the succeeding generations, whiter children.  

At the same time, an ideological split among those advocating assimilation can be perceived. On the one side stood those who advocated the assimilation of individual Aborigines into mainstream white Australian society, and on the other those who advocated group assimilation. While those of the latter persuasion could countenance some value in the maintenance of a form of Aboriginal identity and cultural practice, those of the former persuasion saw such cultural continuity as an obstacle to Aboriginal advancement, and even as a menace to white society. Through a comparison of these positions I want to illustrate the different views, including those concerning what was necessary for the maintenance and enhancement of national cohesion, contained under the rubric of assimilation, in order to show the historical grounding for later shifts in government approach to policies of integration, multiculturalism, and self-determination. At least one strand of assimilation, represented in this chapter by the ideas of the anthropologist A.P. Elkin, was close, in spirit, to these later approaches.

**Biological Absorption and Cultural Assimilation**

In the last chapter I argued that “White Australia” emerged as the dream of Australian nationalists in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The question of where Aborigines fitted in to the white nation could be generally fudged or ignored for as long as they seemed to be headed for inevitable extinction; but as it became evident early in the twentieth century that Aboriginality, at least in the form of mixed descent, was not destined to disappear,

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4 Tim Rowse, in *After Mabo*, 1993, has argued that:

Child removal, practised in all states and territories at some time, has been the most radical and coercive attempt to eclipse the adult authority which is essential to the social and cultural reproduction of Aboriginality (p. 44).
Aboriginal communities were perceived as a problem, even a "menace" to the White Australia ideal.

In the cities at this time, Aborigines were largely invisible; to the extent that the "Aboriginal problem" was registered, it came through the filter of media reports. Humanitarian societies, on the other hand, lobbied governments to "do something". The pressure from white settlers in the rural areas, where there was closer and continuous daily contact with Aborigines, was of a different order. White rural settlers, in the main, wanted Aborigines out of sight: not in their schools, their neighborhoods, their public spaces, not even in their towns, except where they could be used as a cheap and, in some cases, essential labour supply. For various government members and ministers, and especially colonial and then state officials whose job it was to manage Aboriginal affairs, the Aborigines also remained a continuing, and more visible, "problem". From the latter half of the nineteenth century an elaborate network of legislation and administration dealing with Aborigines was established by governments across Australia.5

After Federation, in official classifications concerned with the franchise, and with other rights of citizenship, the indigenous were categorised together with the "aboriginal natives" of Asia, the Pacific islands, Africa, and the Middle East, as unfit for the benefits enjoyed by members of the white nation. The "full-blood" or "tribal" Aborigines did not belong in the new federation; the issue of the belonging or non-belonging of those Aborigines of mixed descent was, however, more complicated, as Chesterman and Galligan have recently noted.6

5 The Victorian colony was the first to enact such full-scale legislation, with its 1869 An Act to Provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria. This gave the Government, and the Board for the Protection of Aborigines, wide-ranging powers to administer the lives of all Victorian Aborigines. Governments in other colonies followed later, in the 1880s and 1890s. See John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, Citizens Without Rights, 1997, p. 16; C.D. Rowley, Outcasts in White Australia, 1971, p. 5; Bain Attwood, The Making of the Aborigines, 1989, p. 84.

6 Chesterman and Galligan, Citizens Without Rights, pp. 12, 36, and especially ch. 4. Apart from the franchise, "aboriginal natives" were excluded from maternity allowance and invalid and old age pensions. Those of mixed ethnicity were not necessarily denied federal citizenship rights. For the
Aborigines with white ancestry—categorised by such terms as “half-caste”, “quadroon”, “octoroon” and so on—carried a complex set of messages about culture and nation; they were, in the eyes of many in the settler community, at the same time Aboriginal but not Aboriginal. The governmental concern with “half-castes” took various forms, reflecting this ambivalence, as the study of administration reports and the relevant Acts shows. One important concern was with the growth of “inferior half-caste” groups, through mixtures of Aboriginal and Negro or Asiatic blood. Complex also were the reasons why the development of the “half-caste” population was deemed a problem. There was the argument based, supposedly, on empirical observation: such people were “neglected”, “destitute”, and would inevitably become a welfare burden. This argument can be found in many Government documents and parliamentary records concerned with Aboriginal issues and legislation, and among the writings of those citizens who took an interest in Aboriginal affairs, from the nineteenth century onwards. There was the commonly held racist view that “half-castes” were in some way degenerate, a betwixt and between people, and that as

See the warning about “alien half-castes” by W.G. Stretton, the Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, in *Northern Territory. Report of the Government Resident for the Year 1910*. At about the same time Baldwin Spencer, the Professor of Biology at the University of Melbourne, wrote, in his Government commissioned report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory, of the wholesale degeneration of Aboriginal women once they had come into sexual contact with “Asiatics.” He saw the increase of “half-caste” numbers as a serious problem. See W. Baldwin Spencer, “Preliminary Report on the Aboriginals of the Northern Territory,” 1913, pp. 43, 46. This was also the concern of some women’s groups, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, who took up the cause against the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women in the 1930s. They were concerned, not only with the plight of Aboriginal women, but with racial hygiene, and especially the need to control the “flotsam and jetsam” coming in from the Pacific and creating “alien half-castes”. See Ann McGrath, *Born in the Cattle*, 1987, p.87.
such they posed a direct threat to a pure white race and/or culture. Here one observes the direct interaction between white racial nationalism, instituted in the White Australia Policy, and communal perception of Aboriginal identities. Not only were there moral and biological dangers inherent in race mixing—within racial discourse the hybrid, the “cross-breed” fills one with horror, for he or she transgresses fundamental racial boundaries—the growing population of Aboriginal “half-castes” presented the threat of the development of black or “discoloured” enclaves in the heart of pure white Australia.\(^8\) The alternative of drawing these people in as equals was abhorrent to many; this resistance was strengthened and hardened by the fact that, at the local level, Aborigines had been used by white communities to signify all that they were not, in terms of cleanliness, status, sexual control, health, endeavour, and good behaviour. The “half-caste” thus strode a boundary fundamental to white self-control and white individual and communal identities. The existence of “half-castes” also gave the lie to images of sexual control and containment, and inspired feelings of shame and guilt; afterall, they had to come from somewhere.\(^9\)

While many people believed that in the “half-caste” were combined the very worst features of each race, on the other hand there were those who considered the “half-caste” superior to the “full-blood”, largely as a result of the “healthy infusion” of European blood.\(^10\) The existence of European blood in the bodies of Aborigines was at times used as a reason for claiming “half-castes” for the white race, and was to play an important role in framing the cause of “uplift of the “half-castes” championed by various humanitarian, “friends of the Aborigines,” Christian and women’s associations and

\(^8\)Russell McGregor argued that in the early twentieth century it was “the threat posed to the ideal of a White Australia, more than any other single factor, that fostered fear of a growing half-caste menace.” Civilisation or Extinction, p. 220.

\(^9\)Patrick Wolfe argues that the hybrid or “mongrel” continues to be a problem for settler identity, since settler society was “unified in contradistinction to the Aborigines and vice versa; the two categories mutually constructed each other. Thus hybridity was repulsive because, in threatening the aboriginal category, it thereby threatened the settler one as well.” White Man’s Flour, 1994, pp. 254-5.

societies. Their white blood inheritance demanded that "half-castes" be given a chance not offered to "full-bloods". The Reverend J.H. Sexton, a prominent advocate for Aboriginal rights in South Australia, argued, in a pamphlet issued by the Aborigines' Friends' Association of Adelaide in 1935, that the "half-caste" was deserving of a better deal:

Whatever may be said about the half-caste, he possesses a superior intelligence to the old Aboriginal, for wherever he is employed he rises to the top and becomes a leader. He becomes a stockman, a drover, and sometimes an overseer. It would be an advantage for the half-castes to be separated from the Aborigines so as to give them an education and training which would fit them for a much better place among the white population.

In order to facilitate this process, he argued, the Government needed to think of these people as distinct from Aborigines, as a new category that the Commonwealth could act for all over Australia because they would not come under the Constitutional restrictions covering the Commonwealth's capacity to act in the area of Aboriginal affairs.\(^{11}\)

The same kind of rationale informed some government officials. In a Northern Territory Annual Report for 1910 the Government Resident Nicholas Holtze argued for the separation of "half-castes" from Aboriginal camps. "If the half-caste female remains with the tribe," he argued, "we lose a possible good addition to European civilization, while with her undoubted higher instincts she is not regarded as a favourable addition to the camp."\(^{12}\)

Assimilation is a complex ideological response to the continuing Aboriginal presence. Concepts of assimilation had a long trajectory; they found some expression among missionaries and government officials in the early nineteenth century, and within the protection regimes that were set up in the latter part of that century. Various named as "merging", "absorption" and, increasingly from the late 1930s, "assimilation", this formation could mean several things. In the minds of many, including the officials responsible for


Aboriginal affairs, “absorption” or “mergeance” could mean: the genetic dissolution of Aboriginal into white “blood”, or, the “breeding out of colour” as it was named; the cultural absorption of Aborigines, or “part-Aborigines”, into white society; or a combination of both biological and cultural visions. What came to be known after the Second World War as the “assimilation policy” was more generally thought of in cultural terms, but could have either an implicit or explicit version of genetic assimilation as an undercurrent or agenda. It thus represented both continuity and discontinuity with the policy of *biological absorption* advocated openly by some administrators in the 1930s.

Though governments and administrations in Australia, in dealing with their indigenous populations, had exchanged ideas and made use of legislation and practices developed in other colonies and states in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was not until the 1937 *Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities* that relevant administrators met to develop a national approach to Aboriginal affairs. The recorded proceedings of this conference provide an insight into the racial thinking of Australia at the time. All states and territories, except Tasmania, were represented. In the years leading up to the *Initial Conference* there had been an intensification of interest in the Aboriginal “problem”—and especially that part deemed the “half-caste problem”—in most states and in the Northern Territory, at both governmental and general public levels. In New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory, for example, the shift from “protection” to “welfare” policies from the 1930s onward was a shift from intrusive to even more intrusive forms of control over Aboriginal lives. The net of administrative control was cast much more widely, as the various administrations adopted more far-reaching definitions of the “native”, where such definitions were not already in place. The 1930s saw the emergence of a more concentrated effort to change Aborigines into whites, culturally, and in some instances physically. In order to do so their lives had to come under tighter surveillance, and their bodies and their movements had to be more stringently policed.

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14For this shift in New South Wales see Peter Read, *A Hundred Years War*, 1988 and *The Stolen Generations*, 1982; and Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*. 

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hand were Acts, laws and Ordinances administered by various
government departments across Australia.

Biological absorption of Aborigines was openly advocated in the
1930s by administrators like Dr. Cecil Cook in the Northern
Territory and A.O. Neville in Western Australia, along with some
scientists who interested themselves in settler/Aboriginal
relations. It received an extensive public airing at the Initial
Conference. The resolution under the heading “Destiny of the Race”
placed the “problem” of the growing “coloured population” firmly in
a national frame, asserting that “the destiny of the natives of
Aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate
absorption by the people of the Commonwealth”; it recommended
“that all efforts be directed to that end.” The resolution did not
specify biological absorption, but it did not discount it either. In the
report of the proceedings there is no evidence of speakers
dissenting from the general view that some kind of absorption of

1996, ch. 19. For Western Australia see Peter Biskup, Not Slaves, Not Citizens,
1973; and Anna Haebich, For Their Own Good, ch. 10. For the Northern
Territory see Tony Austin, I can Picture the Old Home So Clearly, 1993; and
Never Trust a Government Man, 1997. For an overview for all states and
territories, see John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, Citizens Without Rights,
1997, ch. 5.

15For example, at the Moseley Royal Commission in Western Australia (1935),
Dr. Cecil Bryan gave strong support to biological absorption:

I am come to the Commission to ask that steps be taken to breed out
the half-caste, not in a moment, but in a few generations, and not by
force but by science. I mean the application of the principles of the
Mendelian law.

Quoted by Anna Haebich, For Their Own Good, p. 320. Bryan argued against
the “mating” of “half-castes” with whites, but wanted also to outlaw the
“mating” of “half-caste” with “half-caste”; instead, the “half-caste” should
be “mated” with “a coloured person higher in the white scale”, in order to
ensure the “breeding out of the colour”. As paraphrased by Royal
Commissioner H.D. Moseley in his Report of the Royal Commissioner
appointed to Investigate, Report, and Advise upon matters in relation to the
Condition and Treatment of the Aborigines, 1935, p. 8. Though Moseley did not
advocate administrative measures to breed out colour, he did seem to favour
the aim of such strategies, and frowned upon race mixing. See for example
comments on pp. 5-8 of his Report.
the “half-caste” population was necessary. Argument was over particulars, and much discussion centred around the different nature of the problem according to state or territory. Every speaker desired the end result: the freedom of the white nation from the racial problems that beset places like America and South Africa.

The most active vocal proponents of biological absorption at the *Initial Conference*—A.O. Neville and Dr. Cecil Cook—were major figures in Aboriginal affairs of the time. Some of the speakers at the *Initial Conference* were against biological absorption, not on the grounds that it had a genocidal import, but rather because it was unfeasible or unpalatable to the whites whose blood would thereby be mixed with Aboriginal blood. In this they reflected the views of many white Australians, and gave expression to the virulent caste barriers operating in Australia, especially in the rural areas where Aboriginal populations were most concentrated. J.W. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, did not agree with the marriage of “half-caste” women with white men as a way of solving the “colour problem”. In his view it was only the “lower type” of white who would marry “half-caste” women, and this did not lead to either biological or social uplift. Also, he believed that there was always the chance of “throwbacks” emerging among the children of such unions. Finally, such schemes, he argued, made no provision for men of the same “breed.”16 He was, however, as concerned as the others with the colour problem. He advocated a stringent set of measures and extraordinary powers for Aboriginal administrators; given adequate funds, he would create institutions of training for almost everyone of Aboriginal background in order to uplift them. He seemed to think, rather incongruously, that Queensland had the correct way to control the numbers of the “half-caste community” by only allowing them to “breed” among themselves.17

The distinction between categories of Aborigines, in the resolution and throughout the *Initial Conference*, was a crucial one, and was in keeping with long held administrative, scientific and folk beliefs about Aboriginal categories. These beliefs were rooted in the same racism that stood behind the White Australia Policy. The


discussion leading up to the resolution makes it clear that the administrators were concerned that they should not alarm the humanitarians or the scientific world by including “full-bloods” in their plan of merger. As the Chairman of the Advisory Council of Aborigines, South Australia, Professor J.B. Cleland put it, “very vigorous objections would be taken by scientists to any attempt to hasten the detribalization of the full-blooded aborigines, for they are unique and one of the wonders of the world.” He argued that, rather than upset anyone by embarking on a deliberate plan of detribalization, governments “would achieve exactly the same object in the ultimate if we dealt first with natives of less than full blood.” Mr. Carrodus, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, concurred, arguing that it “would be desirable for us to deal first with the people of mixed blood,” and that ultimately “if history is repeated, the full-bloods will become half-castes.”

“Full-blood natives” were to be supervised, with the children of the “detribalised” who lived near white centres to be elevated to “white standards” through education and training, and to take up positions in society where they would not compete socially or economically with whites. The “tribal remnant” was to be preserved in its pristine state, via the creation of inviolable reserves. The overwhelming sense one gets from the proceedings is that the “full-bloods” were not considered much of a problem. If, as was generally believed by most participants at the Conference, the “full-bloods” were destined to die out—the mysterious dying out of a lower race in contact with a higher one—there was no evidence that the same could be said for the “half-castes”, a population that was showing an “alarming” growth rate in many states, and in the Northern Territory. Thus the unanimous call was for a national strategy to deal with that category specifically.

A revealing exception to the view that the “full-blood” would simply die out was Cecil Cook. He raised the spectre of the rise of a “black race” in the Northern Territory that would “swamp” the whites, possibly driving them out or even absorbing them, if protection policies were too strictly adhered to. On the other hand a laisserz faire approach which, in his view, would lead to Aboriginal extinction within fifty years, would weigh heavily on white consciences. In his view even the “full-bloods” had to be ultimately

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absorbed by the whites; in other words carefully bred out. He argued that “unless the black population is speedily absorbed into the white, the process will soon be reversed, and in fifty years, or a little later, the white population of the Northern Territory will be absorbed into the black.”19 Cook’s answer, which he kept pushing for at the Initial Conference, was a more positive breeding process aimed at getting rid of Aboriginality. Cook represented the paranoid element of white Australia nationalism in an extreme form. In a letter written to the Association for the Protection of Native Races (APNR) of NSW in 1931, he spelt out the rationale for control of marriage and other relations between the races in the Northern Territory, in paranoid racist terms:

In the Territory, the preponderance of coloured races, the prominence of coloured alien blood and the scarcity of white females to mate with the white male population creates a position of incalculable future menace to purity of race in tropical Australia, and the Federal Government must so regulate its territories that the multiplication of multi-colour humanity...shall be reduced to a minimum. The future of this country may well be doomed to disaster.20

Similar views can be found in the official reports Cook wrote as Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory throughout the 1930s. The process of absorption could not be left to the working out of mysterious historical laws. Governments and their administrators had an important role to play in augmenting and hastening the disappearance of Aboriginal blood. Neville perhaps put it most starkly at the Initial Conference when he posed the question in the form of a dilemma:

An important aspect of this policy is the cost. The different States are creating institutions for the welfare of the native race, and, as the result of this policy, the native population is increasing. What is to be the limit? Are we going to have a population of 1 000 000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into the white community and eventually forget that there were ever any aborigines in

Australia. . I see no objection to the ultimate absorption into our own race of the whole of the existing Australian native race.21

Neville might not have been a racist hater or fanatic, as such people are commonly understood, and even “kindly” and “well-meaning” as C.D. Rowley argued;22 and yet, he was willing to countenance the complete disappearance of Aboriginality from the continent, as a scientific plan. He shared with many other white Australians a racist world-view, as many of his writings attest. Consider for example the following passage taken from his 1948 book Australia’s Coloured Minority:

Thirty or forty years ago there existed a better type of half-caste. These were robust, meat-eating people—the women big like the men and as vigorous. The family heads were mostly first-cross people. They traveled the country with their camel carts, horses, buggies and what not, in family groups, and they were good, hard workers. They were a people apart, and intermarriage was inevitable. The offspring were not equal to the parents; they ran to seed through intermarriage and became lethargic. But with the admixture of further white blood they recovered some of the original traits, acquiring part of the good qualities of both races; the physical improvement being notable.23

Though he made reference in this passage to the good qualities of both races, his general view was that the “half-caste” only really gained from the mixture of white blood, and not from Aboriginality. In his vision the “half-caste” ascended the scale of culture and civilization to the extent that he or she lost colour through progressive crossing with whites. Colour was a metonym that stood for cultural/racial traits associated with Aboriginality. He believed that the “half-caste” should be forced, through legislative means—especially the control of marriage—to move toward the white rather than back to the black. The desire to be rid of Aboriginality in any form, evident in his comment at the Initial Conference about

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21Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference, p. 11.
22C.D. Rowley, Outcasts in White Australia, ch. 1.
23A.O Neville, Australia’s Coloured Minority, 1947, p. 68.
whether we were to “eventually forget that there were ever any aborigines in Australia”, is evident in this passage also taken from *Australia’s Coloured Minority*:

It would seem proper that like should mate with like—full-blood with full-blood, half-blood with half-blood or lighter—but because so many are near-white we must expect, and have experienced already, legal unions between us and them. It is to the benefit of our own race that the full-blood should not any longer be encouraged to mate with other than full-blood; on the contrary, he should be rigidly excluded from any association likely to lead to any other union. It would be contrary to our view of assimilation to do anything which might force our coloured people back to the black, and moreover *their continued mating with full-bloods is liable to prolong the process of absorption until after there are no more virile full-bloods remaining alive.* [My emphasis]²⁴

The ideology of biological absorption always contained this assumption—and for some a desire also—that the “full-bloods” would die out; as long as the “half-castes” could be absorbed the Australian nation could be free of any real memory that there ever was a people who laid claim to the land before the rise of the settler nation.

Cleland suggested at the *Initial Conference* that a scientific study of the feasibility of absorption ought to be carried out; in 1938-9 Norman Tindale, an ethnologist with the South Australia Museum, together with Birdsell, a researcher from Harvard, carried out an extensive survey of the biological and social situation of Aborigines in South Australia, under a joint Adelaide and Harvard University funded Anthropological Expedition. The long published survey from Tindale was also an extensive and detailed comparison of the situation across Australia. Tindale, Rowley points out, was well aware of the hardening of prejudice in white society, and yet he advocated the turning out of Aborigines from reserves in order that they be spread thinly throughout society. Tindale referred to his proposal for government dispersal of what he saw as “artificial aggregates of mixed-bloods” as a means for enabling the “rapid

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²⁴Neville, *Australia’s Coloured Minority*, p. 56.
dilution of these dark ethnic pockets.”²⁵ Scientifically he had “proven”, at least to his own satisfaction, that the colour could be bred out of the “half-caste” population quite safely through the promotion of sexual relations with suitable whites. But given white prejudice, only those very light-skinned “half-castes” would have the prospect of marriage with whites. The rest of the “darker people” would dwindle from generation to generation through the effects of the harsh environment into which they would be thrown, outside the reserves; this was “nature” taking its course. This, Rowley points out, was also one of the veiled assumptions of assimilation policy. “What Tindale really set out to establish,” Rowley argues, “was the logical way to ensure the most rapid ‘passing’ of the greatest number—and this he did with a cold logic and considerable irony.”²⁶

Tindale believed that “full-blood” Aborigines, wherever they came into contact with white civilization, would die out. It would be wrong to assume that he desired this; for example, he recommended that the Aborigines of the desert be protected from civilisation in an inviolable reserve. There would even be benefits for the pastoral zone that butted on to the desert, since the Aborigines controlled rabbits, dingoes and other pests which threatened pastoralism. He wrote his survey in response to public and especially government concern for what was to be done with the “part-Aborigines.” Despite his expression of sympathy for the plight of Aborigines of mixed descent, and his advocacy of better living conditions—including better wages, education, and food—in his schema there seemed little room for their survival as a people. The trace of Aboriginal blood, and the social and physical characteristics it gave rise to, were at odds with the white Australia ideal which he took as the unquestionable framing ideal against which he worked out his policy suggestions. One of the only virtues of Aboriginal blood, in Tindale’s “scientific” view, was its relatedness, unlike Negro blood, to white blood, and thus its capacity to dissolve through mixing with that “stronger” blood. As he wrote:

²⁶C.D. Rowley, Outcasts in White Australia, p. 34.
Complete mergance of the half-castes in the general community is possible without detriment to the white race. Their Aboriginal blood is remotely the same as that of the majority of the white inhabitants of Australia, for the Australian Aboriginal is recognised as being a forerunner of the Caucasian race. In addition, the half-castes are increasingly of our own blood, in places the majority of them already are more than half-white. Two successive accessions of white blood lead to the mergence of the Aboriginal in the white community. There are no biological reasons for the rejection of people with a dilute strain of Australian Aboriginal blood. A low percentage of Australian Aboriginal blood will not introduce any aberrant characteristics and there need be no fear of reversions to the dark Aboriginal type.\(^{27}\)

Unlike American negroes, Australian Aborigines were not a “virile race”. Thus in Australia one did not have to respond to the possibility of two distinct societies living side by side, as was the case with America and its “Negroe problem”. Aborigines, in his view, had shown no capacity to maintain their own distinct society or culture. Their social and cultural structure faded, just as their colour faded in sexual contact with whites.

The very divisions informing Tindale’s survey emerged from a racial vision of society.\(^{28}\) Thus Aboriginality meant “full-bloodedness”, purity of descent—a belief about the nature of identity that it was assumed, by Tindale and many others, Aborigines themselves shared in their determination of community and identity. For Tindale and other writers, “detribalisation” was often inferred to be the result of mixing of blood rather than other factors, even if some of the writers of such tracts can refer to “detribalised full-bloods”.

My purpose in highlighting these attitudes, reflections, and policy decisions as they emerge from the discourse of government officials was not to spotlight individual racists in Australian history. Rather, I wanted to show how the systematic racism infusing


\(^{28}\) Andrew Markus has made a similar point when discussing Tindale’s survey, in his essay “After the Outward Appearance: Scientists, administrators and politicians”, 1982, p. 91.
Australian settler-nationalism directed these officials to think and feel in certain ways with regard to Aborigines. It also led them to treat Aborigines as objects to be manipulated, as a “problem” to be resolved in order to refine the planned white Australian social order. Ordinary, in many respects conventional, men within that racist system could preside over, and imagine, the most absurd, and in some cases, terrible, schemes for the resolution of that “problem”. The freedom of their use of racist language in public forums showed just how typical, and how respectable, such a cast of mind was for its time, nurtured by Australian settler-nationalism, the historical experience, and memory, of conquest, and other ideological trends (progressivism, racial hygiene and so on).

The vision of biological absorption, embraced by several speakers at the 1937 conference, was never adopted explicitly by governments as a national solution; it was only put into practice openly in a limited sense by the administrations in the Northern Territory and Western Australia in the 1930s. Neville was effectively forced into retirement in 1941, and his biological absorption scheme went with him. Cecil Cook lost his position as Chief Protector in 1939, and the Commonwealth’s New Deal for Aborigines in the Northern Territory, announced during that year, made no mention of biological absorption, speaking instead the language of cultural advancement, welfare and assimilation. However, the idea of biological absorption had often been implicit in administrative practices across Australia, occasionally gaining voice, before and after the 1937 Conference. Peter Read has argued that biological absorption was at least implied, and at times explicitly advocated, in the “dispersal policy” of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in New South Wales from around the turn of the century to 1940. A similar case can be made for other states such as Victoria with its “merging of the half-castes” policy from 1886 to the 1950s. Governments were wary of openly endorsing biological

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31See Aborigines Protection Act 1886 (Victoria), the first legislation to enact such a principle. See the discussion of the Act and its implications for indigenous communities, in M. F Christie, Aborigines in Colonial Victoria, 1979, ch. 8; and Bain Attwood, The Making of the Aborigines, 1989, ch. 4.
absorption as the solution to the "half-caste problem"—perhaps mindful of public sentiment with regard to miscegenation— but in treating it with silence and not actively condemning it, they were, at times, tacitly endorsing it. Tony Austin has made this claim for the Federal Government in relation to Cecil Cook's efforts. There was no Government outcry against what was readily available on the public record concerning his plan, and they seemed happy enough to let him try out his experiment. Similarly, Haebich has argued that the effect of the 1936 Western Australian Act, which was enacted in response to the Moseley Royal Commission, was to provide the Commissioner of Native Affairs (A.O. Neville) with the legislative powers to pursue the biological and social experiments he had been pursuing already, and of which Government members were well aware. Neville himself clearly stated at the Initial Conference that he believed that the Western Australian Government intended to endorse his plan for biological absorption with the passing of the 1936 Act.

From the late 1930s governments at the federal and state levels began to emphasise more openly the plan of cultural absorption of "half-castes". Policies of assimilation were embraced by different governments at different times, but with increasing uniformity across Australia from this time; some governments altered their Aboriginal legislation in ways specific enough to suggest the direct

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32 For evidence of such sentiment, see Marie Reay, "A half-caste Aboriginal community in North-Western New South Wales", 1944-5.
33 Tony Austin, Never Trust a Government Man, p. 211. Ch 8 covers the topic of Cook's plan for biological absorption and the Government's response to it. Robert Manne has claimed in a recent newspaper article that, in the early 1930s, breeding out the colour was in fact the Commonwealth Government's formally embraced policy. He quotes from minutes written by the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, J.A. Carrodus, on 22 February 1933:

The policy of mating half-castes with whites, for the purpose of breeding out the color, is that adopted by the Commonwealth Government on the recommendation of Dr. Cook.

34 Anna Haebich, For their Own Good, pp. 349-51.
35 Aboriginal Welfare: Initial Conference, p. 11.
influence of the resolutions of the 1937 Conference. As with biological absorption, the future of the “full-bloods” or the “tribals” was typically treated with more caution. Many advocated the creation or continuation of inviolable reserves where they could remain relatively untouched until the mechanism of their absorption could be scientifically planned. Others saw reserves as staging grounds where the “full-bloods” would be controlled and trained into assimilation. The “half-castes” were thus the key category of Aboriginality for settlers and their governments, and were crucial to the imagining of absorbing or assimilating Aborigines into the white nation.

In the 1930s and 1940s A.P. Elkin, as anthropological scientist, supporter of missions and leading figure in humanitarian circles, emerged as one of the most influential non-indigenous activists for Aboriginal rights. He was something of a contradictory figure, on the one hand respectful of the intricacies of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual life, and on the other advocating an instrumentalist approach to transforming that life, as if one were dealing with a set of building blocks that might be moved around, guided by expert knowledge. There is a sense in which he, like the officials just discussed, treated Aborigines as “objects” to be manipulated. He was, however, more subtle in his thinking than they were, and displayed a deeper understanding of the way that the deliberate deprivation of culture, and authority structures, by governments and missionaries, could lead to individual and group breakdown.

Elkin was arguably one of the major figures guiding the early development of government assimilation policies. Since these

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36Rowley points to alterations in the South Australian Act in 1939, which for the first time legislated specifically to limit the perpetuation of “half-castes,” by controlling sexual relations between Aborigines (as defined by the Act) and any others. (This did not prevent marriage however.) Similarly, the Queensland Act was altered in 1939 to control, even more strictly, marriage between Aborigines and others: such unions required the written permission of the Director of the sub-Department of Native Affairs. Even marriages between those defined as Aboriginal had to be approved by a protector (almost always a policeman) or a reserve superintendent. Outcasts in White Australia, pp. 18, 22, 25.

exact policies are now associated with the deliberate breaking down of Aboriginal culture, it is of some relevance to explore exactly how a figure like Elkin understood the term, and what he envisaged would occur under its influence as policy. It is also important to think through how this related to, or fitted in with, the vision of a white Australia. Elkin played a central role in the development of the Commonwealth Government’s New Deal for the Aborigines, announced by the Minister for the Interior John McEwen in 1939. Many see this statement as one of the most important early Commonwealth Government documents spelling out a new direction in Aboriginal affairs, shifting policy away from protection to assimilation through the training and uplift of Aborigines in the Northern Territory.\textsuperscript{38} The intervention of the Second World War interfered with the implementation of the New Deal, at least at the Commonwealth level; other states were busily engaged throughout the war in implementing the new Assimilation regime.\textsuperscript{39}

Elkin did not share the basic desires of the biological absorptionists for racial homogeneity; he found the notion of "biological absorption" in particular, and the quest for a racially pure Australia in general, repugnant.\textsuperscript{40} From his earliest writings he argued against the notion of contemporary "pure races". Throughout his long career Elkin maintained that there were broad racial categories, but he argued that all peoples had a level of racial mixture of the main biological races, and this was for the most part to their benefit.\textsuperscript{41} Nor did he share the fears of others committed to a white Australia who saw the continuing growth in numbers of Aborigines as a dangerous development. "What matters in nation-building is not colour", he wrote in the late 1940s, "but culture, attitudes, values, and manner of life." Indeed, in the 1930s he had

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\item \textsuperscript{38} For a good critical discussion of this policy initiative, see E.J.B. Foxcroft, \textit{Australian Native Policy}, 1941, pp. 148-52.
\item \textsuperscript{39} See the statement from the Minister for the Interior (Mr. Johnson), on October 25, 1946, in Commonwealth Government, \textit{Digest of Decisions and Announcements and Important Speeches by the Prime Minister (The Right Hon. J.B. Chifley)}, No. 120, Period—28th September, 1946, to 6th November, 1946, pp. 16-7. See also A.P. Elkin, "Aborigines and the Ministers' Welfare Council", 1951, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{40} See Tigger Wise, \textit{The Self-Made Anthropologist}, pp. 142, 178, and passim.
\item \textsuperscript{41} See A.P. Elkin, "The Practical Value of Anthropology", Part 3, 1929, pp. 33-4.
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formed a view of Australia becoming a kind of bi-cultural or bi-racial society, with Aborigines living side-by side with white Australians, albeit in a society organised by a dominant white Australian culture, with a residual Aboriginal culture adding a “unique flavour to the whole.”\textsuperscript{42} Thus, he was ostensibly concerned to find a place for Aborigines, as Aborigines, within the Australian nation. He had a respect for Aboriginal culture drawn from years of study, especially in the north and west of Australia.

Elkin’s general view, developed in the 1930s was as follows. Aborigines, for better or for worse, had been conquered by white Europeans, just as other peoples throughout history had been conquered. The point was to find ways to ameliorate the “culture clash” and to find some way to prevent the dying out of the Australian Aborigines. During the 1930s he expressed ambivalence with regard to the capacity of Aborigines to become fully civilised. He expressed, in his early work, definite views about the racial superiority of the “white and yellow races” over the Australian Aborigines and the African Negroes. Because the African Negroes and Australian Aborigines were “inferior”, in terms of the possession of those traits necessary for adaptation to advanced culture, there might be limits to the level of civilization that these peoples could reach. He argued, for example, that brain size (which, it was assumed, was directly related to intelligence) differed among the races. It was scientifically “proven” that American Negroes had smaller brains, and that the difference was primarily in the size and development of the frontal lobe, seen as the crucial site of self-control, judgement and reason, which were central to cultural achievement. This might, he argued, help explain the different roles played by the races in cultural history. The Aborigines were, in this respect, analogous to the Negroes. However, he was prepared at least to grant that we could not be certain about the capacity of the “dark races” for advancement from the outset, but could only discover this over the course of time. He also suggested that for the

\textsuperscript{42}See Tigger Wise, \textit{The Self-Made Anthropologist}, pp. 179, 135-7, and 179-80. Elkin thought that the White Australia Policy, and the debates leading up to it, had produced myths about the relationship between colour and culture which had had a continuing detrimental effect on the prospects of the indigenous. See A.P. Elkin, “The Future of the Australian Aborigine”, 1948, pp. 14-5, quote at p. 15.
cultural anthropologist, involved directly in discussions with Aborigines about the complexity of their cultural life and kinship systems, the view of the innate inferiority of the Aboriginal race was at least doubtful. But Elkin himself felt that the argument about culture and environment being the more important influences was less convincing than the biological argument about innate inferiority of primitives.43 These assumptions about race tended to become minimised, though not rejected by Elkin as the 1930s wore on, in keeping with changing scientific opinion.44

As Elkin’s biographer Tigger Wise explained, Elkin, when trying to understand why the natives were dying out through “culture clash”, was greatly influenced by the English gentleman anthropologist George Henry Lane-Fox Pitt-Rivers, and especially by the explanation contained in his book The Clash of Cultures and the Contact of Races, which Elkin read around 1929-30. Pitt-Rivers’ basic thesis was that cultures have a mysterious “culture potential”—a vague combination of physiological, psychological and cultural factors arising from the history of a group’s adaptation experiences—which allowed some cultures to survive and adapt in the face of clash and change. Long isolated groups, like the Australian Aborigines, fell into cultural disequilibrium and their culture potential could not cope once they were confronted by an alien European culture. In Pitt-Rivers’ biological/racial argument, miscegenation allowed a group to cope and adapt to change since it introduced new biological-cultural elements into the “breeding stock.” Elkin found this appealing, and in his eyes it seemed to explain the capacity of “part-Aboriginal” groups to adapt to white society. Thus he argued that:

...a people may be so adapted ethnically (biologically) to its culture that it cannot adapt itself to an immigrant culture, and further, that such a culture only becomes implanted...

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44See McGregor, Civilization or Extinction, p. 326, and Ch. 5 in general. As Andrew Markus has shown, in a brief survey of Elkin’s work in the 1930s, it is not really clear how Elkin’s views altered with regard to the question of race and intelligence. See “After the Outward Appearance”, pp. 92-6.
amongst a native population as the latter has become miscegenated with the bearers of the new culture.\textsuperscript{45}

This emphasis on the biological aspect of adaptation of “inferior races” to a higher culture stood behind Elkin’s continuing distinction between “half-castes” and “full-blooded” Aborigines in his later work, and especially with regard to citizenship.

In 1944 Elkin published his small book \textit{Citizenship for the Aborigines: A National Aboriginal Policy}, which rehearsed and built upon a series of popular and academic articles he had written during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{46} Elkin argued that there was an emerging climate of government and public opinion that saw the need for a shift from negative (protection) to positive (welfare) policy for the Aborigines, which had been developing throughout the 1930s. As Elkin characterises it, this was a general call for the uplifting of Aborigines, including the preparation of “half-castes” and “full-bloods” for citizenship. From the evidence of this book and other writings, it is apparent that Elkin shared certain assumptions about the need for Aborigines to “improve” before they could take their place as equal citizens. “Advance and progress must be made in all aspects of life by the whole native community”, he wrote.\textsuperscript{47} Aborigines were to be slowly worked upon and reshaped by a range of white specialists and professionals, into a form appropriate to the modern age. In a 1937 paper on “native education” he suggested that teachers and other educators should endeavour to promote the “good” and try to weed out the “bad” and the “incompatible” in Aboriginal culture; the assumption was that the European expert could “know” Aboriginal culture in such a way that they could pinpoint good and bad qualities. Similarly, anthropologists could reveal the inner workings of indigenous society and thus ameliorate the clash of cultures, by “offering guidance in the gradual

\textsuperscript{45} “The Practical Value of Anthropology”, Part 3, p. 40. For his more extended explanation of this process, see “The Practical Value of Anthropology”, Part 1, pp. 27-32.


replacement of its parts."\(^{48}\) To this end, Elkin specified what educators needed to do in order to adapt natives to the requirements of civilization; this included extensive training in the significance of the employment contract, the value of time and money, "inculcating a high appreciation of the principles of hygiene and personal cleanliness" and, most importantly, "eradicating the nomadic background and developing the community sense centred upon the provision of a home for the individual and his family and the exploitation of the soil and domestic animals as a source of food supply."\(^{49}\) He viewed, and sought to make, anthropologists as scientific experts central to the management of Aboriginal affairs; there were, thus, paternalistic, and social engineering, elements in his approach.

In the third chapter of *Citizenship* Elkin spelled out his policy proposal in specific detail. He divided the indigenous up into "half-caste", "mixed-blood" and "full blood" communities in various stages on the road to civilisation. He argued that certain categories of "half-caste" and "mixed-blood" should be granted citizenship immediately. In some specific instances "full-blood" individuals might also be granted full citizenship; in the case of "full-bloods" generally, however, there was still a need for protection and enlightened control until the process of uplift had been completed. Thus, there was a place for inviolable reserves for "tribal full-bloods", but under the guidance of white officials. The underlying assumption was that these people and their children were also to be gradually tutored into civilisation. In an earlier chapter he had stated clearly that the reserves were not for the preservation of Aboriginal culture in pre-contact form, but were to be training grounds or preparation bases.\(^{50}\) Under the heading "Purpose of the Reserves" he wrote:

> Development of self-supporting communities based on village organization, a constant family life, and food-production (gardening, farming and stock-raising), leading to some degree

\(^{48}\)See McGregor, *Civilization or Extinction*, p. 346, for quotation. See also Elkin, "Native Education, with special reference to the Australian Aborigines", 1937.

\(^{49}\)Elkin, *Native Education, with special reference to the Australian Aborigines.*

of industrial life (tanning, curing marine products, wood-work etc.), and exchange of products with the outside world.\textsuperscript{51}

To the extent, however, that he saw their Aboriginal cultural life as intact, the emphasis was upon preserving its “best features”, and making use of its “mechanisms” to effect the necessary adaptation. Things were different for Aborigines not of the “full-blood.”

The most important assumption guiding Elkin’s advocacy of controlled assimilation of people of mixed descent was that such people lived in a cultural vacuum. Elkin argued that the social function of religion or philosophy, of binding individuals into communities, was absent with the “mixed-race” people. Caught between two cultural systems, their moral life was “pathetic”. The “almost a-moral type of life that so many of the mixed-bloods live”, he argued, “can be attributed in large part to this absence of moral and spiritual purpose and sanctions.” The remedy was to draw them into Christian communities. The splitting of Aboriginal identity between ignoble “half-castes” and noble “full-bloods” allowed Elkin, on the one hand, to honour the Aboriginal world-view, and on the other led him into a sort of moral blindness to the cultural devastation experienced by Aboriginal people in New South Wales—his main sphere of influence in Aboriginal affairs—under the assimilation regime that he supported, and participated in, at the time. As historians of the period, like Peter Read, have stressed, the supposedly anomic communities that Elkin perceived retained strong cultural and kinship systems and ties to the land in the face of government attempts to disperse and transform them.\textsuperscript{52}

“Elkin may have tried to play God in New South Wales”, Tigger Wise argued, “but he had not thought of assimilation for the full-blood Aborigines at the price of their Aboriginality.”\textsuperscript{53} This remark from his biographer is revealing. Aboriginality was, it seems, something that those in the sparsely settled regions of the north and west, who Elkin had extensively studied, still possessed. The sort of Government interference in the everyday lives of Aborigines

\textsuperscript{51}Elkin, \textit{Citizenship}, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{52}See Peter Read, “A Rape of the Soul so Profound”; and \textit{A Hundred Years War}. See also Heather Goodall, \textit{Invasion to Embassy}, and Barry Morris, \textit{Domesticating Resistance}.

\textsuperscript{53}Tigger Wise, \textit{The Self-Made Anthropologist}, p. 230.
in New South Wales—shifting them from place to place, taking their children away in some cases, "protecting" them from "bad habits"—was acceptable to him in a way that he would have found abhorrent for those he deemed to still possess "significant" Aboriginality, if his own testimony is to be believed. "Full-bloodedness" was a sign for Aboriginality; mixed descent was taken as a sign of Aboriginality's dissipation. Thus, speaking in the late 1950s against the Commonwealth's assimilation policy, he could say:

The full-blood Aborigines will become literate and educated, skilled and more fitted to play parts in our economic life, but they will remain in the foreseeable future Aborigines in their social and kin relationships and in their appreciation of values. They will earn money, but their use of it and of what is obtained with it will be determined by their kinship ties, NOT by our concept of individual ownership, just as their houses will in many cases be shelters for relations, not for the exclusive use as a home for an individual family, and probably too, work will be regarded not as a responsible relationship to an employer, but as an inescapable food gathering activity when the cash is low.\(^54\)

This comment was made in Elkin's speech to Section F (Anthropology) of the 1959 ANZAAS conference, and was partly a rebuke of the idea of assimilation that had been voiced in an earlier speech to the Conference by Sir Paul Hasluck.

A more thorough account of the forces guiding Elkin's actions and policy suggestions would require a consideration not only of his views about the virtues of "full-blood" as opposed to "half-caste" cultural life, but the imperatives of government administration as part of the politico-ideological realm in which he made his interventions. The more he set himself up as a government adviser, as the expert on Aboriginal affairs, the more his pronouncements—and his actions as a member of the NSW Native Welfare Board—became attuned to the immediate concerns of transforming Aborigines into people almost indistinguishable from other white individuals, in line with Government policy of supporting a white Australia. Much later, in the late 1950s—when his influence on

Commonwealth policy was negligible—he became increasingly concerned at the tenor of the Federal Government’s ideology of assimilation. The Commonwealth’s assimilation policy displayed no respect for Aboriginal culture, and advocated that Aborigines only really benefited to the extent that they moved away from Aboriginal community to become dispersed, as individuals, in white society. This can be seen in his response at the 1959 ANZAAS conference (cited above), and in the revised epilogue he wrote for the fourth edition of The Australian Aborigines, published in 1964. In the latter he argued strongly that the future of Australia’s Aborigines was within the economic, social, political and religious structures of mainstream society, but that they would continue to engage with that society as Aborigines. Significantly, this was so for the “mixed bloods” as it was for the “full bloods”—no more was Elkin speaking of the moral vacuum that characterised the former’s social life. He saw evidence of the reclamation of Aboriginal traditions and, especially, a burgeoning sense of separate Aboriginal group identity. True, he still tended to denigrate the activities of the “mixed-race” people of NSW in comparison with that of the “full-bloods” in the central and northern regions, but he saw the strength of group identity and the reclamation of Aboriginal myth, language, ritual and tradition as a positive and necessary development leading to group assimilation.55 From the late 1950s other writers associated with Oceania, the journal Elkin edited, articulated a vision of Aboriginal integration into Australian society that was increasingly opposed to Federal government Assimilation ideology. There was a tendency for these writers, as there was for Elkin, to see continuing Aboriginal identities, especially among the “mixed bloods”, as the product of the rejection and caste barriers of white society; as if, given total white acceptance, these people would have readily thrown off their old identities and embraced the new identity proposed for them. The alternative might have been to recognise the actual strength of an historically achieved Aboriginal identity. But there was also the recognition, implicit or explicit, that the Aboriginal people themselves saw abiding value in their


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Aboriginal identities, despite all government attempts to break these down.\textsuperscript{56}

The most important government figure promoting that vision of \textit{individual} assimilation, against which the above argument for group assimilation or integration was ranged, was Sir Paul Hasluck. Upon becoming Minister for Territories in 1951 Hasluck had assumed the role of administering and reshaping the Commonwealth policy of Assimilation in the Northern Territory, and of coordinating a similar response from the states. He was thus a central Government player in, and ideologue of, assimilation. In April 1952 Hasluck gave a speech in the House of Representatives reporting on the Native Welfare Conference of September 1951, where he explained at length the Government’s intentions and its view of its assimilation policy. There are three striking elements of this speech. The first is the way that he explicitly seeks to bring Aboriginal welfare—uplift—into line with a broader nationalist agenda, while pointing out that there was nothing new in such a view of things; according to his view, it was simply an implementation of the “fair-go” that underpinned Australian nationalism. The second is the way that the speech presents only two competing responses to Aboriginal policy: either individual assimilation or segregation.\textsuperscript{57} The third point is his emphasis upon the benefits of civilisation, and his defence of the notion of progress, as justifying assimilation. Assimilation was presented as a non-coercive policy which, he argued, did not mean:

\ldots the suppression of the aboriginal culture but rather that, for generation after generation, cultural adjustment will take


\textsuperscript{57} Hasluck stuck doggedly to this view over time, as can be seen from \textit{Shades of Darkness} where he reiterates the same point.
place. The native people will grow into the society in which, by force of history, they are bound to live.\textsuperscript{58}

This might hint at a notion of cultural survival but, as another passage of the speech reveals, it is exactly cultural survival in any real sense that is called into question by the nationalist agenda underpinning his vision of assimilation. In considering what he calls a second kind of segregation on missions and reserves—which would not mean necessarily the setting up of a permanent lower caste, but a level of continuing cultural autonomy—he argued that even this approach went against the national plan:

Such segregation could take place in settlements and missions solely occupied by natives. The objection to this policy is that, if it succeeds, we will build in Australia an ever-increasing body of people who belong to a separate caste, and who live in Australia but are not members of the Australian community. We will create a series of minority groups living in little bits of territory on their own. The more the method succeeds, the more awkward it will be, for it will result in the very situation in Australia which we have always sought to avoid, namely, the existence of a separate racial group living on its own.\textsuperscript{59}

This, I believe, represents the relationship between biological absorption, assimilation and the ideal of white Australia: the desire, and the proposed state strategy, to prevent at all costs the continuation of an Aboriginal identity that would stand apart from, and potentially against, a single national community. Individual Aborigines were one thing, but continuing Aboriginal communities were a serious threat. This view of Aboriginal difference as threat is evident in Hasluck’s own formulation of assimilation, which was the official government definition:

The policy of assimilation means in the view of all Australian governments that all aborigines and part-aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting

\textsuperscript{58}The speech is reprinted in Paul Hasluck (Minister for Territories), \textit{Native Welfare in Australia}, 1953. Quote is from p. 17.

\textsuperscript{59}Paul Hasluck, \textit{Native Welfare in Australia}, p. 18.
the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians.⁶⁰

Cultural homogeneity was, clearly, of central importance to the nation envisaged under this assimilation regime.

Casting his eye back, in the late 1980s, over his long involvement in Aboriginal affairs, Hasluck argued that he was always guided by the idea of treating Aborigines as individuals who deserved their chance in the wider society. What this meant was that Aboriginal tradition and belief had to be dissolved:

I believe that in the long run, perhaps several generations ahead, the vestiges of an aboriginal society, in spite of many ingenious attempts to find a new cohesion, will gradually fade away, but there will still be Aborigines in Australia. An education system or any other part of administration that looks to the future will give a chance to the Aboriginal to be whatever he wants to be and is capable of being within an evolving society. He should not be held tightly inside a group.⁶¹

This was in part a swipe at the policies that Hasluck saw as replacing assimilation—integration or, even worse, self-determination—which he considered to be regressive. Though he went on to qualify this remark by saying that governments should not, on the other hand, actively attempt to break down group cohesion where it still exists, it is clear that the emphasis of government policy, in his view, should not be to encourage, let alone foster or reinvent, group cohesion among Aborigines.

To illustrate his point, Hasluck discussed his view on the transfer of Aboriginal children out of the Northern Territory to the southern states. This had been a policy fostered by the churches.

⁶⁰Statement from the Hon. Paul Hasluck, MP, The policy of assimilation: Decisions of Commonwealth and State Ministers at the Native Welfare Conference, Canberra, January 26th and 27th, 1961, p. 1. Hasluck gives the text of a letter he wrote in 1952, clarifying what was meant by the assimilation policy; his definition and explanation are basically the same as the official formulation of 1961, and uses many of the same sentences. See Paul Hasluck, Shades of Darkness, 1988, pp. 126-8.

⁶¹Hasluck, Shades of Darkness, p. 120.
and the Northern Territory administration since the 1930s in the case of “quadroons” and “octaroons”, who white families and institutions favoured for their lighter skins. He emphasises that his approach during his time as Minister for Territories did not involve a policy of wholesale removal of “part-Aboriginal” children. He mentions the pressures from the churches of the south for more removals which he resisted, arguing that in each case the child had to be considered as an individual case; it was not the Government’s intention, he wrote, “to draft children in mobs like sheep”62. Yet the criteria seemed loose enough for administrators to take a wide view of what would be in the best interests of the child. He notes that in a minute of 12 September 1952 he wrote that:

The policy of assimilation was likely to be assisted by transferring out of the Territory into suitable institutions and private homes in the southern States those “light-skinned children who have no strong family ties in the Territory.”63

How the lack of strong family ties was to be interpreted, and who was to do the interpreting, are questions that Hasluck does not raise. The guiding principle for the approach was given by Hasluck:

The transfer of children out of the Territory was usually operated by placing children with families or in ‘homes’ which had links with a Christian mission. In giving financial assistance for these transfers of children out of the Territory the government was concerned to ensure that the youngster would really benefit from such a transfer and the test of that purpose was two-a sided. One was that the circumstances in which he lived in the Territory were unfavourable to him and the other was that the transfer would give him a better opportunity.64

This was only one aspect of a process of child removal which resulted in increases in Aboriginal children taken from their parents in the service of welfare and assimilation.65

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62 Hasluck minute, 6 March 1959, quoted in Shades of Darkness, p. 122.
63 Hasluck, Shades of Darkness, p. 121.
64 Hasluck, Shades of Darkness, p. 122.
65 In the Northern Territory more Aboriginal children were removed than ever before between the 1950s and the 1970s under the Hasluck-Geise administration. See the figures, drawn from Northern Territory Welfare
Hasluck argued that assimilation was not a positive policy aimed at breaking down Aboriginal society, but rather a recognition that breakdown was already occurring; he and other interested parties were guided in this by what at least some anthropologists were arguing. The alternative of designing policies to impede that breakdown were, in his view, pointless. This meant that Aboriginal welfare would only be enhanced through the movement of Aborigines into white society. It also meant that Aborigines had little to bring to white society (or the Australian nation), but instead needed to be adapted to it. This is clearly implied in Hasluck's more extensive discussions of assimilation, where the metaphors of decline proliferate:

There was nothing that could be recognised as an homogeneous and integrated aboriginal society. Here and there throughout the continent there were crumbling groups of aboriginal people bound together by ancient tradition and kinship and living under a fading discipline. There were also scattered groups who, having lost the cohesion of tradition, were kept together by tattered threads of kinship and the influences they felt in their common lot of dwelling on the fringes of the Australian community. None of these groups could be identified as a society in the same way as the rest of the people in Australia could be identified as a society. Such considerations as these had led realistically to the conclusion that the problem was not one of finding ways in which two or more societies could live side by side in the same continent but of finding the way in which the remnants of the aboriginal race could best become members of a single Australian society.

In an address in Sydney in July 1959 Hasluck used an even more unfortunate, and startling, metaphor for Aboriginal social ties:

[They are] tangled in their own distressed situation like flies on sticky paper. They could fly if only they could get clear of their

administration reports, complied by Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation*, 1995, pp. 60-1. See also *Bringing them Home*, 1998, Ch 9, for an account of child removal policies in the Northern Territory.

66Shades of Darkness, p. 130.

67Shades of Darkness, p. 131.
surroundings, lift themselves free of their past, leaving behind them their present life.\textsuperscript{68}

In the face of such a view, continuing assertions of Aboriginal identity could not be taken seriously. Since Aboriginal society was irremediably “crumbling”, what child would not ultimately be better off by being moved out of such a “group-in-decline” into white society? Hasluck even thought it fortunate that Aboriginal society had not been able to manage more resistance in the face of the onslaught:

Looked at from one point of view, the weakness of the old Aboriginal society and of the present day groups of Aborigines is an advantage. The more it crumbles, the more readily may its fragments be mingled with the rest of the people living in Australia.\textsuperscript{69}

Clearly there could be no recognition of the ongoing role of Aboriginal traditions and beliefs, or kinship structures, for the orientation of Aborigines in modern Australian society. These needed to be encouraged to fade away, since they only served as obstacles to advancement. Hasluck’s response to such persistence of identity is to claim that it is not Aboriginal identity at all, but some creation of white society and western traditions. This claim relied upon older racial myths, like the one propounded by Tindale that the Aborigines were not a “virile race” like the Negroes. In an address at a symposium in 1958 Hasluck used similar language to Tindale’s when explaining why there were very few “real” Aborigines in post-settlement Australia. He detected in the “new fashion” for speaking of “integration” a romantic notion about contemporary Aboriginal cultural life, expressed for example in the “vogue of Central Australian paintings” which he compared with the sale of mass factory-produced boomerangs and koala bears. “The numbers of the immigrant race and the vigour of the alien culture which now dominate the Australian continent”, he said, “are so


\textsuperscript{69}Hasluck, 1959 ANZAS Section F speech, quoted in Tigger Wise, \textit{The Self-Made Anthropologist}, p. 230.
strong that it is very doubtful to my mind whether the aborigines can survive either as individual aboriginal men and women, or considered as a separate culture." It was his opinion—albeit "recorded tentatively"—that "the loss of any valid and distinctive aboriginal culture is certain in the course of time." Claiming that Australia had a social but not a racial problem, he contrasted this situation with that of North America:

The position of the American negro in the United States is to my mind a racial problem because both races are vigorous and, in spite of some "crossing over" the outcome is likely to be the continued existence of two races side by side.

Hasluck's argument was that, from observation, Aborigines did not display a vigorous group life; but this observation did not take place in a social and political vacuum. Afterall, many governments, administrations, and missionaries had, from the nineteenth century onward, deliberately set out to smash Aboriginal group life, and to separate the generations. Hasluck's argument was a convenient ideology to shore up the white Australia ideal of one homogenous culture throughout the Australian territories.70

There was no recognition on the part of Hasluck, and one suspects on the part of most other government figures enamoured of assimilation, that the indigenous might find their own way to an accommodation with mainstream white society while maintaining their group life. In Hasluck's view the main reason why Aborigines might gravitate to these groups was a negative one, not an affirmation of their continuing identity as Aborigines. Thus everything should be done to make white society embrace them, and everything done to prevent the formation of Aboriginal groups:

If he could not find the protection and shelter in circumstances which gave a clear hope for eventually entering Australian society he might seek his own shelter and protection within a group composed of persons like himself and these groups had a tendency to harden and become less penetrable than the individual. If we were confident about the eventual entry of all Aborigines into Australian society, as full members of it, we had

70All quotes from the 1958 address, published as "The Future of the Australian Aborigines", 1959.
to recognize that the grouping together of aboriginal people might become one of the most serious obstacles to change.71

Though Hasluck found the racist views of others concerning Aborigines repugnant, his liberal individualism,72 together with his commitment to the nationalist aim of creating one community in Australia, led him to endorse measures which infantilised a whole category of people and denigrated their cultures and cultural aspirations, in the name of assimilation. As Rowley implied, there was a certain irony in this. For it was Hasluck himself who had the responsibility of implementing in the 1950s a form of policy which, in legal terms, treated the individual Aborigine as little more than a "born idiot," in a way not far removed from the Western Australian policy regimes of protection that Hasluck had so rightly criticised in exactly these terms, in his groundbreaking study of 1942, Black Australians. The 1953 Welfare Ordinance—the main instrument of the Commonwealth's assimilation policy—which came into operation in 1957, created wards of most Aborigines and gave to the Director of Welfare powers over Aborigines which meant that they could not vote, could not decide for themselves where or how they would live, who they would marry or associate with, where and how they would work, how they would spend their wages, or how they would bring up their children.73 It reproduced the same racist logic that

71Shades of Darkness, pp. 131-2. Despite this Hasluck claimed that he was not himself in favour of forced dispersal of Aborigines, as he makes clear in a 1963 letter outlining the intention of government policy. Hasluck to the Rev. Canon Coaldrake, 3 January, 1963, quoted in Shades of Darkness, p. 137. As the letter reveals, Coaldrake was critical of assimilation, believing that it meant that Aborigines would be forced to give up their Aboriginal identity. Hasluck denied this, even if, by his own admission, it would seem preferable.
73Hasluck had been criticising the 1936 Western Australian Aborigines Act Amendment Act of 1936 when he wrote, in Black Australians, that the Act confined "the native within a legal status that has more in common with that of a born idiot than of any other class of British subject." Quoted by C. D. Rowley, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, p. 304.
divided communities up by blood: only “full-bloods” were to be caught in the net of wardship, and some of these could apply for exemption if they had reached a certain level of civilisation. Nevertheless, by 1961 99.5% of those classified as Aboriginal were declared wards by virtue of the provision which referred to “personal characteristics”. This meant that of 17 000 “full-bloods”, only 89 Aborigines were not declared wards. As Chesterman and Galligan point out, it was not racially neutral in another sense: under section 15 any person who was governed by Aboriginal protection legislation in Western Australia, Queensland or South Australia was automatically declared a ward as soon as he or she entered the Northern Territory.74

Concluding Remarks

The comparison of Elkin and Hasluck reveals the interweaving of related, distinct and even contradictory views among those advocating assimilation; the open conflict between them in the late 1950s points to a more general fissure between those who saw some value in the maintenance of aspects of Aboriginal life and tradition, and those who advocated the continuance of the processes of dismantling of culture in the effort to produce individual Aboriginal citizens no different to other white citizens. Each position

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74Chesterman and Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights*, pp. 174-5. They took their figures from the Commonwealth’s *Report from the Select Committee on Voting Rights of Aborigines*, 1961, p. 7. The Report lists the relevant classification of ward as follows:

Pursuant to section 14 (1.) of the *Welfare Ordinance* 1953-1960 a person may be declared a ward, if that person by reason of—

(a) his manner of living;
(b) his inability, without assistance, adequately to manage his own affairs;
(c) his standard of social habit and behaviour; and
(d) his personal associations,

stands in need of such special care or assistance as is provided for by the ordinance.

Furthermore, as the Report pointed out, being a ward cancelled voting rights in the Northern Territory, (and thus at the Commonwealth level), under Section 22 of the Northern Territory Electoral Regulations, unless he or she had been a member of the defence forces, p. 7.
implied a different vision of what was absolutely necessary for the
maintenance, and enhancement, of national cohesion. For Elkin
Australian society could function successfully with different
identities interacting. For Hasluck such identities got in the way of,
and even threatened, the social order of the nation—the movement
toward true nationhood meant the atrophy of group identities that
might provide the basis for disloyalty toward the “one community”
of the Australian nation-state.

Out of this breakdown of unity among assimilationists emerged
government policies of integration—the acceptance of the at least
temporary value of cultural traditions in allowing groups to
integrate into mainstream society—and then, from the 1970s,
notions of multi-culturalism and, specifically for the indigenous,
self-determination and land rights. Elkin’s view of assimilation,
especially in the 1950s, is almost identical to integration, and very
close to multiculturalism. It would be stretching things, however, to
claim that Elkin’s view was close to self-determination.75 The latter
includes a notion of the indigenous taking full control of their own
lives and is closely tied, in my view, to indigenous land and other
rights. Elkin did not believe that the indigenous could find their own
way unguided by white experts—especially anthropological ones. He
had no time for those claiming land rights. The brand of assimilation
advocated by Hasluck—the mainstream government position of the
time—was antithetical to integration, multiculturalism, and
especially to self-determination and land rights. Those who continue
to advocate a return to assimilation in the present clearly mean that
form articulated by Hasluck. It is of some consequence that Pauline
Hanson, who was recently at the forefront of those attacking policies
of self-determination and indigenous land rights, quoted directly
from a 1955 Hasluck speech in her own maiden speech to
parliament, thus at least attempting to situate her own extreme
views within a “legitimate” form of Australian nationalism.

“Hasluck’s vision was of a single society in which racial emphases

75 Russell McGregor argues that Elkin’s version of assimilation, and later
government self-determination policies are almost the same, except that the
proponents of the latter, in their rhetoric, are no longer progressivist. See
were rejected and social issues addressed”, she said; “I totally agree with him, and so would the majority of Australians.”76

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Part Two: Contemporary Forms of Settler-Nationalism and the Politics of Indigenous Rights
Chapter Four: Two Modes of Settler-Nationalism

The second part of this thesis examines settler Australia's attempts to come to terms with its resurgent indigenous populations and their various claims to recognition, separateness, land and other rights. The negotiation of this admittedly difficult terrain has been emotionally fraught. As my central focus I consider the case of Aboriginal land rights. The real economic and developmental issues—particularly concerns with pastoralism and mining—have no doubt played a significant role in stimulating the heat of the public debates on this issue since the 1960s. Even so, it seems that the emotional heat generated goes beyond rational calculation on the part of a majority population in the face of the claims of an indigenous minority. For some non-indigenous people these claims have been intensely unsettling. At the same time, there have been significant numbers of the non-indigenous, and some governments, willing to contemplate arrangements that accommodate indigenous aspirations.

The question of indigenous rights is, among other things, concerned with the interaction of identities: settler, indigenous, and national. Part of the reason for the difficulty settler governments have experienced coming to grips with indigenous demands stems from the development of settler-nationalism, the forms of identity it instantiates, and the phantasies that underpin it. For the greater part of its history Australian settler-nationalism has meant the negation of Aboriginal identity, rights and interests. Central to this negation have been unresolved questions concerning land ownership, national sovereignty and the way that Aboriginal identities, rights and interests interact with these. The powerful phantasy of the settler-nation encompassing the continent underpins the central Australian discourses on the national. Where nationalist discourse has sought to include Aborigines, as it has been increasingly obliged to do since 1967, Aboriginal identity has presented it with a problem. Where Aboriginal distinctiveness is denied or ignored, Aborigines are coercively incorporated into a
single homogenous Australian people with a single destiny. Where it is recognised as in any way distinctive, it is frequently reincorporated in an expanded understanding of the Australian nation.

In my reading two basic modes of settler-national imagining can be perceived in contemporary Australian discourses of the nation. Each has implications for the perception of Aboriginal identities and Aboriginal rights. In the first mode, which I term *assimilationist*, settler-nationalism works to keep Aboriginality out of the nation, and can only allow Aborigines into the national community as full moral members if they give up their claim to Aboriginality. This is because, as I will show, the national community is imagined as culturally (and in some examples, either implicitly or explicitly, racially) homogeneous. In the second mode, which I term *indigenising*, settler-nationalism attempts to bring Aboriginality in, in the service of a rapprochement between settler and indigene that will, at the same time, reassert the legitimacy of the nation. Here the nation is imagined as a diverse community with the capacity to tolerate, and even promote, different cultural aspirations and forms of life. Aboriginality is valued, not only because it is (just) one more example of the rich tapestry of the nation, but because it can bring specific gifts to the nation: most potently, the connection between nation and land at the heart of the nationalist dream, to have been in a place from time immemorial. Thus they each, in their different ways, encode settler-nationalist agendas.

The dominant mode in Australia has been assimilationist settler-nationalism. Its key themes were crystallised within the symbol “White Australia.” Its ascendancy, which I traced in chapters 2 and 3, began to falter some time around the Second World War; since then it has been expressed in a more defensive and reactionary manner, at times explicitly responding to the emergence of its competitor, indigenising settler-nationalism. The latter is evident in the discourse surrounding multiculturalism, the Reconciliation process, the Mabo judgement, and the Aboriginal land rights movement more generally. The desire for reparation is paramount, together with the attendant acceptance of national guilt or shame and national responsibility for past and present. A level of ambivalence about the national inheritance is either implicitly or
explicitly registered. It is generally accepted that the national community has the capacity to engage in good and bad action.

In my argument concerning the structure of the two nationalisms I place special emphasis on their affective dimensions; at the same time, as my discussion makes clear, the two nationalisms order the past differently, drawing out different emphases and implications for the present. They are social-historical productions drawing on the history, among other things, of relations between settlers and the indigenous. My two nationalisms are modes for constructing reality; they are available for political movements and for individuals as ways of being national. They are thus not simply intellectual positions taken up, but ways of living and organising information and events. Individuals and political groupings have investments in them. Similar themes are often treated. The key to understanding the differences is in the "style of the imaginings" as Benedict Anderson has put it; or, to paraphrase Cash, thematic content may remain the same across the different modes, and yet at a more fundamental level a structural distinction may be perceived.¹ Cash has argued that ideologies "incorporate or encode the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, along with their characteristic defences and affects", and that this "produces intersubjective significatory systems which have encoded within them discrete, and primitive, modes of constructing and evaluating reality."² Similarly, the two modes of settler-nationalism can be delineated according to the way that they tend to express, and are organised by, psychological processes and affects characteristic of Klein's two positions: the paranoid-schizoid for assimilationist settler-nationalism, and the depressive for indigenising settler-nationalism.

Klein made a general distinction between the forms of anxiety that the individual seeks to defend him or herself against. The distinction is by no means clearcut, but nevertheless may be made in accordance with the psychological positions in which it characteristically arises:

²Cash, Identity, Ideology and Conflict, p. 79.
persecutory anxiety relates predominantly to the
annihilation of the ego; depressive anxiety is predominantly
related to the harm done to internal and external loved objects
by the subject's destructive impulses. Depressive anxiety has
manifold contents, such as: the good object is injured, it is
suffering, it is in a state of deterioration; it changes into a bad
object; it is annihilated, lost and will never be there anymore.

Depressive anxiety is closely bound up with guilt and with
the tendency to make reparation.3

Each form of anxiety can involve a fear of disintegration, but in two
distinguishable ways: in persecutory anxiety the fear of
disintegration relates to the ego, from the attacks of the myriad
projected bad parts of the self, and the response is rage and
counterattack; the disintegrative fear in depressive anxiety is that
the good internal objects have been broken into pieces, and that the
ego must work to restore them, and involves complex feelings of
sorrow and guilt in relation to the object.4 The two modes give
expression to, and provide individuals with defences against, these
different forms of anxiety, with assimilationist settler-nationalism
being organised more around persecutory anxiety, and indigenising
settler-nationalism around depressive anxiety. Thus, in certain
important respects, the response to Aboriginality within the two
modes of settler-nationalism is driven by unconscious forces.

In each of the two following sections of this chapter I outline
the key structural features of each settler-nationalist mode, with
the aid of several prominent examples, including some drawn from
anonymous in-depth interviews I conducted in a Victorian rural
town in 1997. Both modes, as my examples show, exist as
contemporary forms of nationalism that compete for the hearts and
minds of the Australian populace.

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4See Melanie Klein "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive
States", (1935) 1988, pp. 269-72; “Mourning and Its Relation to Manic-
Depressive States”, (1940) 1988, p. 348.
Assimilationist Settler-Nationalism

In its account of the past assimilationist settler-nationalism tends to be celebratory. The celebratory aspect is not in itself a distinguishing mark: all forms of nationalism celebrate the national past. But the exclusion of ambivalence in such celebration is an important feature. The celebratory tone is animated by a conviction that real progress has been achieved through settler development. It adheres to the modernist (and colonialist) ideology of the gradual assertion of “civility” over “barbarity”, and is defensive in the face of the critique of colonialism, and of any dismantling of notions of progress. In fact, the notion of progress is a key legitimising element pervading the whole discourse, and is central to the way that identities—specifically settler and Aboriginal—are perceived.\(^5\)

The typical nationalist fantasy, as Kenneth Minogue pointed out long ago, is of the peculiar virtue and valour of one’s compatriots.\(^6\) In assimilationist settler-nationalism there is little evidence of ambivalent feelings about the assertion of individual and group virtue, in comparison with non-national others. The Australian individual and the Australian people are celebrated as generous, open, courageous in war and in the face of adversity, champions of the oppressed and so on. These assertions of virtue, or in psycho analytic terms, this idealisation of the nation object, can be used to stifle national self-criticism, and to minimise even the worst blemishes on the nation.

In response to versions of the national story that reveal less honourable aspects of the growth of settler culture and consciousness, it is at times impatient, at other times defensive or angry. This mode of nationalism relies upon a myth about the growth of Australian national culture that, for the most part, excludes the Aboriginal presence, and the impact of that ongoing presence for national identity. The narrative is dominated, structured and given legitimation by the doctrine of *terra nullius*. It

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\(^5\)This can be seen quite clearly in Geoffrey Partington’s recent formulation of the assimilationist position in his book *Hasluck versus Coombs*, 1996. The concept of progress is the central legitimising ideology for the defence of assimilation, a defence which relies upon the dredging up of all the old arguments about the savagery of Aboriginal society.

is within this discursive regime that the “great Australian silence,” which W.E.H. Stanner noticed in his survey of Australia’s generalist and popular histories, is most evident.  

Intellectuals play an important role in the cultivation of nationalism. The production of national histories is in itself part of the process of the formation of national identities. Thus history texts can be explored for the different ways that they construct the nation. Geoffrey Blainey, as an historian and social commentator in the media, has done much to articulate assimilationist settler-nationalism. It is interesting, in this respect, to note that he has also produced an important book dealing at length with Aboriginal life on the continent. That popular work—*Triumph of the Nomads*—helped to dismantle certain myths about the simplicity of Aboriginal culture and its lack of innovation or technological know-how, by detailing the complexity of Aboriginal dealings with, knowledge and transformation of, the natural environment. However, one notices that even here, in the moment of celebration of Aboriginal culture, there is something else going on. As in other examples of assimilationist settler-nationalism, in *Triumph of the Nomads* Blainey makes use of the ideological strategy of treating Aboriginal history as a bygone, and conquered, era. In Blainey’s histories there is always a radical break between this “triumph of the nomads” and white civilisation.  

The construction of different eras of history in Blainey’s texts plays a key legitimising role for the form of nationalism he embraces. The “Aboriginal era” can be treated from a safe distance, and as one that has been surmounted by the British era of conquest. The latter is a *fait accompli*; there is no real need to justify it, except in the grand narrative of world history in which civilisations rise and fall, almost like natural events. Through naturalising conquest, Blainey, and other assimilationist settler-nationalists, provide an implicit justification for dispossession. The claim is that it could not have been otherwise, and this frees the nationalist to celebrate the past, to dwell on the history of progressive development rather than the process of dispossession. But even within this narrative

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8 Henry Reynolds points this out in his essay “Blainey and Aboriginal History,” 1985.
there is some residual need for explicit legitimation. The Aboriginal fate of dispossession is ultimately justified by the “greater productivity” of the settlers: they could feed and clothe millions, where the Aborigines “contributed nothing” to world trade.\textsuperscript{9}

The consigning of Aboriginal history to the past serves other ideological purposes too. It allows a kind of honouring of Aboriginal society at a safe distance. The two histories are basically kept apart; in Kleinian terms the past is “split”, not so much into good and bad, but into two separate pasts with their predominantly good, but also bad features. The good in Aboriginal society can thus be recognised in the pre-contact phase. This might give the appearance of the ambivalence characteristic of Klein’s depressive position. However, the splitting of historical experience itself is a paranoid-schizoid mechanism of defence, a mastering of ambivalent messages (and thus anxiety) about the past. As Klein pointed out, splitting was one of the fundamental defences against persecutory anxiety.\textsuperscript{10}

One detects, within such an approach, two forms of Aboriginality: one strong and stable, the other weak and unstable.

\textsuperscript{9}See A Land Half-Won, 1983, p. 98. In a later book Blainey repeated the claim, referring to the economic success of the colony of Victoria. Notice also the idealisation in the following legitimatory claim:

\begin{quote}
Indeed, their success is, by one crucial test, more remarkable than that of almost any people in any part of the world. Through ingenuity Victoria now supports at least 250 times as many people—and perhaps 400 times as many—as it supported in Aboriginal times. Moreover Victoria feeds, clothes and warms millions of people in other places. Here, in a brief time, has been repeated one of the main themes of human history during the last few thousand years: how ingenuity, often a hazardous ingenuity, has enabled millions to live where once lived only thousands.
\end{quote}

Aboriginal identity is, thus, itself split into “good” and “bad”, or “authentic” and “inauthentic”. In the first sense, Aboriginality means the pre-European-settlement people Blainey depicted in *Triumph of the Nomads* and in short chapters in his other histories. In the second sense, Aboriginality is a *trait* that clings, precariously, to those people who have some line of hereditary descent from the “pure” or “tribal” Aborigine; it is unstable as a category, and tends to break down. Because, for these settler-nationalists, Aboriginality is rooted in a past of “traditional life”, it is not an identity that can continue into the present. Once the break with tradition occurs, Aboriginality largely evaporates, and with it the difference between those who refer to themselves as Aboriginal, and other Australians. Thus, contemporary Aborigines are not considered “real” Aborigines.

Clearly, in the way that it orders Aboriginal and Australian identities, the notion of a place in time is central. Aboriginality is set in “pre-neolithic” time, and wherever it spills beyond that time-frame it loses its *essential* quality. Where Australian identity gathers depth through the movement of history and the accumulation of culture—it moves irrevocably towards identity—Aboriginality dissipates. Allowing an Australian identity a developmental history, it at the same time disallows Aboriginal identities political legitimacy by arguing that to develop means to lose Aboriginality. Within this discourse there are two ways of dealing with the past. For the white settlers it is important to remember “where you have come from”, and to dwell on the achievements rather than the negatives—thus Blainey’s claim that, for the most part, Australia’s “has been a fortunate history.” For those of Aboriginal descent, however, too much dwelling on the past will not help them. As Blainey has put it: “The future of the Aborigines lies in looking to the 21st century, not to the 18th

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13Geoffrey Blainey, *Blainey Eye on Australia*, p. 49.
century.”14 One past enriches, the other is damaging and best forgotten.

Positioning in evolutionary time also serves to justify dispossession. As Blainey asserts, the clash between Europeans and Aborigines and the “inevitable” defeat of the latter was as much a case of incompatible “ages of man” as that of incompatible cultures: “In their use of the land and their technology they were ages apart: in short, even with good will on both sides, they were incompatible.”15 Aborigines, cut off from the rest of the world, did not progress through time, but remained in an age that others elsewhere had passed through. They were living a life that Europeans had “overcome” 10 000 years before. They “missed” the neolithic revolution and therefore could not have been expected to survive. By 1788 Australia “was by far and away the largest zone on the globe where the doomed way of life survived.”16 Aboriginal society’s “time lag” meant that, no matter how much good will expressed by the Europeans, the outcome would have been the same. “In hindsight”, Blainey argues, “other solutions might have been applied to the chaos and misery arising from the historical anachronism of a modern society confronting a long-quarantined survivor of the Stone Age. But no solution would have been very effective.”17

While the diversity of humanity is not, in itself, fear-arousing for those positioned within this mode of settler-nationalism, it becomes so when it is found within the boundaries of the nation-state; for them, cultural homogeneity is fundamental to social cohesion and stability.18 The stress on cohesion, though it is present in the other mode of nationalism, is here pervasive, driven by an underlying fear of national descent into chaos.19 For this reason, one

14Geoffrey Blainey, Blainey Eye on Australia, p. 125.
15Geoffrey Blainey, A Shorter History of Australia, p. 22.
18Discussing immigration policy Blainey asked: “Should Australia so select its immigrants that the society is relatively unified? Or should it select immigrants who promote diversity?” All For Australia, 1984, p. 2.
19Sir Paul Hasluck, in his Light That Time Has Made, 1995, stresses again and again his fear that the nation has lost, or is in danger of losing, its principle
of the most resonant tropes used by assimilationists to criticise multicultural policies, and in parallel fashion any form of government acquiescence in the face of Aboriginal calls for separate treatment as a distinct people, is that of the fragmenting, or war-torn, ethnically diverse country. These social fears reverberate with, and draw upon, more individual or personal fears, the fear of “the strange that resides within the self,” as Julia Kristeva has put it: the inkling that one’s own identity is not as secure and contained as one might desire it to be; that one is in fact a “stranger to oneself”; is riven with unconscious desires and phantasies that threaten the integrity of a unified self. On the experience of foreigners Kristeva has written:

Also strange is the experience of the abyss separating me from the other who shocks me—I do not even perceive him, perhaps he crushes me because I negate him. Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of my experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel “lost,” “indistinct,” “hazy.” The uncanny strangeness allows for many variations: they all repeat the difficulty I have in situating myself with respect to the other and keep going over the course of identification-projection that lies at the foundation of my reaching autonomy.20

To experience the uncanny is to experience depersonalisation, a “destruction of the self”. This can be productive in terms of opening one out to the other, or regressive in terms of defending oneself, by retreating to a more rigid self, or even through the manifestation of psychotic symptoms.21

Assimilationist settler-nationalism, at the cultural level, responds to the dilemma faced by all individuals, through the retreat to a more rigid identity. The cultural expression of the fear of the subject split and not in control of its own psychic boundaries is a fantasy of cultural homogeneity. The fantasy is that, through

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21Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 188.
the establishment of such homogeneity, doubt, division, complexity, and contradiction can be expelled from the national territory, to be observed with horror in those “heterogeneous” states that can not control their populations. The integrity of the boundaries formed by the coastline of the continent—together with its nearby islands—must be maintained as the boundaries of “one nation.” Within those boundaries peace and prosperity might reign if “otherness” can be kept out; or, at the very least, can be neutralised. The nationalism of White Australia gave expression to this fantasy, and to some extent assimilationist settler-nationalism is continuous with that earlier nationalism, never fully endorsing that understanding of the basis for Australia’s prosperity, but never fully denouncing it either.

As I have been arguing, Melanie Klein’s notion of the paranoid-schizoid position, the defences it typically draws upon, and the primary affects characteristic of its functioning, helps explain the structuring of assimilationist settler-nationalism. Splitting, for example, is prevalent in various different ways. I have already mentioned the splitting of identities in accordance with eras of time. Another prominent strand separates the past from the present. If there were atrocities and sins in the past, these have no real bearing on the present. The “badness” involved in dispossession, if it is at all recognized, is relegated to a past event. Also expressive of the paranoid-schizoid position is the general air of persecution, involving the hunting out of national enemies and the call to arms in defence of the “besieged” nation. The defence involves an intense idealisation of the Australian nation and of the national past, tempered only slightly by the recognition that in the past some injustices might have been committed. This admission is predominantly played down, and usually features as part of a defence of the nation against those who, it is claimed, can see no virtue in the national past and the Australian nation. This, too, is revealing of the operation of paranoid-schizoid mechanisms. While there are certainly those “enemies” who denigrate their own national community, scorning it in an outpouring of guilt and self-loathing, these are counterbalanced by the many others who point to the defects without seeing in this a wholesale disendorsement of the nation. What angers assimilationist settler-nationalists is the ambivalence: the way that critics of the nation do not share their idealisation. Critics of the nation and its past become, in the eyes of
assimilationist settler-nationalists, persecutors, enemies whose secret aim is to bring the nation down. They would rather attention were focused upon the uniqueness of the Australian achievement, as if the nation really were in danger of collapsing should such criticisms be broadly paraded in public and accepted as truths.

The inescapable dilemma—that the settler nation was founded on dispossession—is downplayed, repressed, denied, rationalised. The fact that the angry denials are so prevalent hints at the fact that even the deniers sense there is some substance in the claim. The hunt for those who promote “the lie”—for example, the “black armband” historians—is in the end fruitless, if the purpose is to blame. For if the legitimacy of the nation is so unquestionable, the argument that a few “moral crusaders” could reap the whirlwind of doubt, points to the scent of illegitimacy. Where the response here is denial, in the case of the other mode of nationalism the dilemma is a call to positive action: if the nation is illegitimate we will make it legitimate.

Klein argues that guilt comes to prominence as an organising emotion, alongside feelings of loss, love, gratitude and the desire for reparation, in the depressive position. The capacity for holding, accepting and doing something constructive about guilt, as with envy, is considered by many psychoanalysts to be a sign of subjective development.\(^{22}\) The complete denial of guilt, and other forms of manic defence, while operative within the depressive position are not characteristic. Klein argued that even in the earlier paranoid-schizoid position depressive and guilt feelings are experienced, but they tend to be fleeting and unfocussed as they relate to part objects, and stem from a less integrated ego. As the child develops towards the depressive position, with its more integrated ego, it experiences deeper and more lasting feelings of depression and guilt, because they are related to whole objects. This painful psychic reality gives rise to positive (reparative) and negative (manic defensive) responses:

The more integrated ego is now increasingly confronted with a painful psychic reality—the complaints and reproaches emanating from the internalized injured mother and father

\(^{22}\)A.F. Davies makes this point in “Guilt and Politics”, 1988, p. 49.
who are now complete objects, persons—and feels compelled under the stress of greater suffering to deal with the painful psychic reality. This leads to an overriding urge to preserve, repair or revive the loved objects: the tendency to make reparation. As an alternative method, very likely a simultaneous one, of dealing with these anxieties, the ego resorts strongly to the manic defence.\textsuperscript{23}

Klein in her essay “On Identification” also mentions the possibility of regression to the paranoid-schizoid position in the face of intolerable depression, where splitting and projection once again become predominant.\textsuperscript{24}

“Guilt” has been a potent presence for some time in all discussions of the colonial past. What is of interest is not so much whether, in an intellectual sense, a concept of collective guilt can be sustained, as the way that guilt, and even its less psychologically painful compatriot “shame,” is so thoroughly repudiated by many who are situated within assimilationist settler-nationalism. Such repudiation involves an idealisation of the past, and of national identity, which sees in any real admission of guilt the potential for the destruction of the loved object: the nation as it has always been known, the myth of the Australian legend. Those who carry guilt messages, as I suggested above, are often demonised as enemies within, as the witting or unwitting lackeys of foreign interests. Persecutory anxiety is thus pervasive.

To illustrate this I will examine published speeches from a conference held in 1994, organised by a small group of leaders and members from the Uniting Church, calling themselves “The Galatians Group.” They had formed their association in response to a Covenanting Statement read at the seventh assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia on the 10th of July, 1994. The covenanting statement admitted that the churches had done much wrong in the past, in their missionary work, and in their role within the broader colonising process which had dispossessed and done violence to Aborigines. On the whole it reads as an attempt at reparation for past abuses, in a language that, while admitting the devastation


\textsuperscript{24}Klein, “On Identification”, p. 143.
experienced by Aborigines, was not overwhelmingly self-condemnatory. It engages explicitly at several points with the discourses of reconciliation emanating from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. It is interesting in itself that most speakers at the Galatians conference read the covenanting statement as almost completely self-condemnatory, one respondent titling a section of his talk “Forgiveness for What?” and describing the covenant as “containing morbid expressions of contrition and guilt for the actions of others, and containing some misrepresentations of fact.”

The prominent (then ALP) federal member for Kalgoorlie, Graeme Campbell, who also spoke at the conference, saw guilt as a gnawing sickness, and idealised the British colonists as far better than any other colonists the Aborigines might have had. Thus he completely repudiated what he saw as an outrageous attack by the Uniting church on the role of Christian missions in Australia, and upon the Australian nation as a whole. The tone of his speech was generally triumphal and dismissive. Not only was there no need to feel guilt, shame or regret in the present over the treatment of Aborigines in the past, or in the contemporary period; those colonists of the past had no real cause to feel guilt or regret for their actions either. The coming of civilisation to Australia, he argued, was a great event. Even those early religious figures who pointed the finger in the face of massacre are castigated by Campbell; they began the rot which we


26 Klein refers to the connection between omnipotent thought, denial and mania:

The sense of omnipotence, in my opinion, is what first and foremost characterizes mania and further...[T]his mechanism of denial originates in that very early phase in which the undeveloped ego endeavours to defend itself from the most overpowering and profound anxiety of all, namely, its dread of internalized persecutors and of the id. That is to say, that which is first of all denied is psychic reality and the ego may then go on to deny a great deal of external reality.

“A contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-depressive States,” 1935

1988, p. 277.
are now witnessing, that guilt which is “gnawing at the vitals, not only of the churches, but of the country itself.”

Dr. Edgar French in his contribution to the conference analysed the concept of guilt in its various distinguishable forms, and the calls to action it provokes. He provided a broad explanation for the rise of guilt in Western societies, and what he saw as the dangers this presented for nations. Early in his address he singled out Marxists as the first to successfully use the imposition of guilt as a political tool to destabilise nations and make them more amenable to revolution. This was in the form of the “guilt of imperialism”—the colonisers decimating the colonised. Thus he presented us with a scheming enemy typical of the paranoid world. National guilt in any form was an irrationality, he argued. In contemporary Australia the enemies were the “media moralists” who, since the late 1950s, have constantly attacked “the values and sentiments of the colonial past” and “who have managed to insinuate the idea that the national heritage is constituted of things outworn and evil.” At one point in his address he referred to the process whereby a form of “moral guilt”, which called for reparative action, became instilled in the minds of those who, at the very most, should only feel what he termed “empathetic guilt” about a past they played no part in, as a “rape of a refined sensibility”. Where there is rape there must be criminals. The experience of national guilt was, in his view, “a pathological condition wrought by an unscrupulous magnification and distortion of natural empathetic guilt.” The unscrupulous were the moral crusaders, but of their real intent French left us in the dark. Why did they impose this unfounded guilt on all of us? Why did they want to denigrate the national past and so weaken our national identity?

French claimed that there was no moral guilt attached to the nation, even in the past, because the settlement of Australia was an unstoppable feature of European expansion. “The European occupation of Australia,” he argued, “was implied in the logic of

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28 French, “The Analysis of Guilt”, 1994, p. 60. The preceding quote is also from p. 60.
certain world-shaking developments of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which subsequently went on to produce the vast European diaspora that populated the North American prairie, the Brazilian pampas, the African veldt, and the Siberian steppe.” We were “part of that irresistible movement which, to be sure, might have been better managed wherever it took place, but which ultimately could not be denied.”

The real actions of Australian men and women towards Aborigines could not be held to moral account since they were part of that inexorable movement.

French went even further in his removal of morality from the past, citing the cause of maintaining national stability: we could not look at the past in terms of its morality because it might threaten the legitimacy of the nation. Such questionings of the past constituted a persecutory attack. Use of the term “invasion” to refer to the process of colonisation—for example in school texts—French saw as the fixing of “the mark of Cain on the unsuspecting children in the schools.”

If we admitted too freely to past blame, then we too would be dispossessed. It was simply not safe to entertain, let alone hold for any length of time, that sense of guilt.

In the same vein Geoffrey Blainey, in his address at the conference, spoke of the dangers of reconciliation if it was not handled skillfully:

To my mind there is a special reason for trying to be constructive today. In handling aboriginal issues and aboriginal needs, Australia is sailing into rocky seas. Important parts of Australian life are at risk of being thrown overboard. Even Australia’s independence is being endangered in the long term.

And a little further on:

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31French, “The Analysis of Guilt”, p. 64. He was referring to specific proposals in New South Wales at the time. Ironically enough perhaps, assimilationists are less touchy over terminology where other peoples are concerned. Geoffrey Blainey used the term “invasion” to describe the 1850s drift of the Chinese across the “unguarded” border of South Australia into Victorian gold fields, in Our Side of the Country: The Story of Victoria, 1984, p. 49.
Guilt and reconciliation are becoming a sharp weapon for those who find it useful to deny the legitimacy and the morality of their nation. If you deny the legitimacy and the morality of your nation, you undermine it and you prepare it for changes cleverly imposed by others. That is why the Federal Government tries to manipulate the process of reconciliation.\textsuperscript{32}

The whiff of government conspiracy is in the air; what these interests are, except squashing free speech in Australian democracy, Blainey does not really say.

In Blainey's address, Aboriginal land rights in general, and the debate over Mabo and Native Title legislation in particular, are constructed as a battle between those who would defend “one Australia”, and those who would set about dismantling it. The statements of some of the judges of the High Court in Mabo are referred to as “astonishing”; Blainey argued that they would only encourage the growth of an already unhealthy feeling of independence among Aborigines, and ultimately a push for their own separate state. Blainey called up key fears about disintegration. An accusation of cowardice and even treachery infused his reading of politicians’ responses. They were “silent” in the face of what he clearly found alarming statements from Aboriginal leaders. The statement that he cited, from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Dodson, was read by Blainey almost as a call to separation, when at face value it was not. In fact Dodson suggested three alternatives, and did not say which was the preferred one in his call for the right of Aboriginal self-determination:

[I]n theory if certain conditions were satisfied, the right of choice may be exercised to form a separate independent state. \textit{(By that he meant a separate nation.)} Equally, regional autonomy might be sought or full integration with the Australian state.

Blainey's interpolation (i.e. see italics) hammered the point home if anyone missed it. For these expressions of Aboriginal independence

\textsuperscript{32}Blainey, “Is it all Black and White?”, 1994. Quotes from pp. 4, 5 respectively.
and cultural assertions he blamed, not Mr. Dodson, but all those non-Aboriginal Australians “who scoff at Australia’s achievements”:

Nothing does more to weaken Australia than the persistent attempts to deride its history and to deny its present legitimacy as a nation. The call for a republic seems odd in this context. Any independence that Australia gains by becoming a republic would be tiny compared to the loss of independence likely to stem from confused policies on aboriginal questions.³³

At its more extreme edge assimilationist settler-nationalism embraces a form of white racism. To illustrate I draw on an interview I conducted in 1997 with “Les”, a publican in a rural Victorian town. In his discourse white identity is equated with civilization and Aboriginal identity with barbarism. Social reality is thus clearly split between ideal and persecutory part-objects. The question of law and order becomes paramount. Aborigines, as the carriers of fears about the breakdown of societal order, represented by unemployment, poverty and the crime rate, needed to be brought under firmer control by the agencies of the state. The incursion of Aboriginal ways into the realm of civilization needed to be checked. Aborigines either had to accept white civilization totally or else do without any of the benefits of that civilization. Here is “Les” speaking about the racial problem that he perceived as threatening his town:

There seems to be a law for the whites and one for the blacks.
They want, they want the white man’s ways but they don’t

³³Blainey, “Is it All Black and White?” p. 6. Blainey’s assumptions about the sources of Aboriginal aspiration are even more curious given that he is a renowned historian. For as he must be aware, indigenous claims are now formed, not only against the background of what goes on in their own nation-state, but in a context of developing international notions of indigenous rights, and forums within the UN. In highlighting the paranoia of his response, the choice of Mick Dodson is particularly revealing, for Dodson explicitly denies that indigenous peoples in Australia (or elsewhere in the world) desire the dismantling of the nation-states that enclose them. See Dodson’s essay “First Fleets and Citizenship: The Citizenship Status of Indigenous Peoples in Post-Colonial Australia”, 1996, pp. 192, 202.
want the rules... I mean they've become very violent they, ah... they just demand and believe they should be allowed to do what they want to do. Because there's so many people stickin' up for them today and sayin' they're gettin' victimized, and it, it is not true.

The answer, in Les's view, was to force Aborigines to abide by the law, which was, in his own words, "white man's law"; the problem in Les's eyes was that they were almost inherently incapable of doing so, a thoroughly "undisciplined race" that shunned authority and was prone to criminality.

The split between white and Aboriginal identities, already noted as a feature of assimilationist settler-nationalism, here becomes exaggerated, with the idealisation of white identities and ways and the projection of all that is bad into Aborigines. Law and order is the pivot around which the split revolves: where whites are predominantly law abiding and face the full brunt of the law when they are not, the majority of Aborigines break the law and get away with it because white society has become too afraid of the accusation of racial persecution. Speaking of his experiences as a publican dealing with clientele, Les gives the appearance of balance but the message is clear that Aborigines on the whole cause trouble:

I mean, sure we get, you do have trouble with white people, too, don't get me wrong, but ah, maybe one percent of white people and I would say um eighty-five percent of Aborigines that will cause trouble... That's a big difference.

In this respect Aborigines compare unfavourably with non-Anglo ethnic groups:

I mean you get an Italian group come into your hotel you will very very rarely have any trouble, very very rarely. And the reason being because they've got discipline at home, and they respect authority, and they're brought up to respect the authorities and that's what life's all about I suppose.

Les embraces stereotypes of Aborigines—as lazy, undisciplined and prone to unpredictable violence—that have a long history stretching back to early colonial days:
...to make it worse the majority of the ones we've got around here, our taxes go to support them to allow them to do these sort of [criminal] things. ...Like there's none of them will go out and work. ...Very few of them do anything.

In a move characteristic of assimilationist settler-nationalism, Les reverses the whole persecutor/persecuted dichotomy:

And they scream and yell about how they're victimized and persecuted. It's a lotta bullshit because um I think its the whites that are victimized and persecuted, we're the ones that have to, if we do something wrong we've gotta pay.

Even though I have emphasised the exclusion of Aboriginality in my discussion of assimilationist settler-nationalism, the latter nevertheless contains a form of individual inclusivism—as Australian citizens, not as Aborigines. Assimilation policy, though it treated Aborigines as a group with certain group characteristics that prevented its members, temporarily, from fully entering the Australian nation, allowed for the gradual inclusion of individual Aborigines shed of their Aboriginality. The explicit or implicit denigration of Aboriginal culture and group-life, contained in assimilation policy and discourse, played against its doctrine of inclusion. Because Aborigines could not be expelled from sight forever, assimilation became, for some settlers, the best of a bad set of political solutions to the “problem” of Aboriginality. Les again provides a useful example. Assimilation is acceptable to Les, but in a very strict sense: Aborigines are tolerable only to the extent that they “behave as white people do”. It is not even certain that they are “capable” of assimilation to a civilized (read “fully human”) way of life. Speaking of the debate surrounding the “stolen generations” Les purported, through a circular logic, to be able to deduce proofs of whether Aborigines were capable of “living like whites”:

The thing is that most of those kids that were taken away from probably their tribes or whatever would be turned into better kids they were educated where they would never have been where they were anyhow. ...I always wonder what the end result of all those kids are, are they better off or they're not? If they're not, well, okay it shows that you can't assimilate them into Australian society, into the white man's society, so leave
them out in their ignorance, out in their humpies and let ‘em fend for themselves if that’s what they want. They were just at least given the opportunity.

Here is a complete denial of guilt, a refusal to acknowledge the pain and suffering experienced by those separated from their parents, and a subsequent inability to mourn the past; instead, Les is defiant and angry that the ways of the past, how Aborigines were controlled “back then”, have disappeared. Any assertion of Aboriginal pride, as for example in the promotion of their own football team in his area, is taken as a threatening assertion of identity that should have no place in “assimilated” Australia. Even where Aborigines attempted to fit in by moving into houses in “white areas” Les understands the white intolerance for their close proximity: “your land value just plummets the moment they move into the street”.

The government itself, to the extent that it fails to provide the preferred order of relations between settler and indigenous becomes an enemy, a traitor to the white community it is predominantly meant to serve:

The only way the government has let us down is not enforcing the laws. As they should, they are handed down for a white person. (So you’d be very, pretty unhappy with the way the government has shifted over the period?) It’s an absolute bloody disgrace! Really is.

The government becomes in Les’s eyes the agency responsible for creating a situation where he can not treat his Aboriginal clientele the way he wants to without being branded a racist. Governments both Labor and Liberal contribute to the situation by reducing police powers to act, resulting in a situation where he feels that he, along with the rest of the white community, is being persecuted by the Aboriginal community. The instinct is to persecute in return:

...you know, we up here have gotta do something about this before you get these gangs of white youths going around and perhaps belting up the blacks from being out on the street; probably it’s the only way that they are going to be taught what is not theirs they can’t touch.
Indigenising Settler-Nationalism

Julia Kristeva, in her small book Nations Without Nationalism, presents a novel view of the nation, posited as an ideal that might free national subjects from the tyranny of rigid particularism, through the embracing of a universalism based on the knowledge that we are all, in our common humanity, “strangers to ourselves.” Basing herself in the tradition of the French Enlightenment, she argues for a form of cosmopolitanism which she sees as the only way forward for humanity, away from the destructiveness of “tribalism”. Her ideal nation is made up of a series of differences which nevertheless give way at some point before the general interest, “the esprit general favoured by Montesquieu.” In other words, the sense of nationness that individual citizens carry with them in such a nation is one which combines a sense of common interest with an acceptance, even an applauding of, individual, familial, ethnic and cultural differences. The nation, in this view, is analogous to what Winnicott termed a transitional object: that area of space and play which keeps as a tension the paradox of separation and belonging, of self and not-self. The concept of transitional object was coined by Winnicott to capture the way that a child makes use of objects—a teddy bear or doll, a scrap of material—to condense its own evolving self image with that of its mother’s, while at the same time growing away from her.34 What happens at the level of individual identity, Kristeva argues, parallels what happens at the level of collective identity:

There are mothers (as well as “motherlands” and “fatherlands”) who prevent the creation of a transitional object; there are children who are unable to use it. As a counterpoint to that psychoanalytic account, let us give thought to the transitional nation that offers its identifying (therefore reassuring) space, as transitive as it is transitory (therefore open, uninhibiting, and creative), for the benefit of contemporary subjects: indomitable individuals, touchy citizens, and potential cosmopolitans.

She admits that this is a fragile idea, and one which must compete against fervent impulses, and aggressive nationalism that are both present and emergent; but she argues that it might also be “a

resource for new forms of community among individuals that are different and free.”

Kristeva’s concept of the ideal nation can be considered as the prototype implicit in the mode of nationalism I call indigenising. This mode is underpinned by an image of the nation which registers the necessity of its cultural, ethnic or racial diversity. A useful metaphor was suggested by H.C. Coombs, who drew directly on an indigenous image:

The Yolngu people of East Arnhem Land have a metaphorical image to illustrate the coming together of ‘peoples from far away’. Two streams of water flow into a coastal lagoon: one stream is tidal and salt from the sea; the other fresh from the rain on nearby hills. As the streams enter the lagoon there is, on the surface, the chaotic froth of their interaction which gradually establishes a recognisable pattern as the streams merge with the lagoon. But their separate identity is not wholly lost. At various levels the streams continue to exist, influencing and changing, but not destroying the diversity in the character of the lagoon. It is perhaps an image which Australians, white as well as black, could well incorporate into that of the Australian nation—of unity expressing and protecting diversity and autonomy.36

The nation is conceived as a container of diversity. The discourse is essentially forward looking: the nation is in process of becoming, and one of the only certainties is that tolerance of diversity is necessary for what it might become.37 It engages with the key Australian nationalist symbols—the nation of the fair go, mateship, egalitarianism and tolerance, the democratic, socially progressive nation striding ahead at the forefront of a changing world. These symbols and ideas constantly recur in the discourse, though in a

35Julia Kristeva, Nations Without Nationalism, 1993. Quotes at pp. 41-2 and p. 47, respectively. The question that truly needs to be addressed is the working out of exactly where the level of difference must give way before the general interest.
37See also Zygmunt Bauman’s depiction of the tolerance of ambivalence in postmodern communities, in his Modernity and Ambivalence, 1991.
new alignment, and infused with the spirit of reparation. The paradox it must manage to admit into public recognition, and not really attempt to dissolve, is this: that the nation is founded illegitimately, and yet is itself legitimate. One of the questions it leaves largely unanswered is: if the nation is (and always was) so progressive and based on an egalitarian ethic—the notion of “the fair go”—how was it that Aborigines were treated so badly and for so long? Another is: to what extent was the very creation of this new world nation founded on, and dependent upon, a refusal to acknowledge the rights and humanity of the Aboriginal other? It is thus ambivalent about its own nationalism, at one moment extolling the virtues of the nation, at another admitting the capacity of that same nation to commit terrible wrongs. The nation is in Klein’s sense a whole object. Though an idealisation of the nation still surfaces, it is counterbalanced by a more sober view of the capacities of nations to do wrong.

An indigenising concept of the nation is evident in many of the speeches of the former Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating, a political figure whose pronouncements in this regard are especially deserving of close analysis given the importance he gave to Aboriginal affairs and reconciliation during his prime ministership. In many ways his approach to Aboriginal issues exemplifies indigenising settler-nationalism. In a speech titled “The Benefits of Diversity”, given in 1995 at a conference in Sydney, Keating posited Australia’s diversity as a source of value, strength and pride, but also posed the more sobering view that in the international context diversity had sometimes been a source of tension and failure, and often took “the form of tragic and intractable conflicts.” The difference, however, between this mode of nationalism and that previously examined lies in the response to this potential threat. Rather than imagining that diversity could be kept out of the nation,

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38This is one of the key questions which Australian culture must address, according to Bernard Smith in his Boyer lectures, The Spectre of Truganini, 1980.

the nation must find new ways to handle it, even to be enriched by it. Diversity is thus itself seen as inherently ambivalent, rather than as a metonym for cultural disintegration. The speech raised questions concerning the impact of globalisation, especially in terms of the way it undermined traditional notions of national economic sovereignty. Keating pointed out that conflicts were breaking out at the sub-nation-state level, "the reflection of a world in which very often the nation and the state are no longer the same thing."40 The speech, then, was in part an effort to suggest new ways of thinking in a global sense; i.e., beyond the structures that the United Nations set up to resolve and minimise major conflicts between nation-states. That is the speech's context, but my main interest is the way that it posits Australia, and seeks to encourage an ethic of cultural diversity.

Keating suggested two responses to intractable conflicts and to the way that globalisation had fundamentally changed notions of national control of internal affairs. One response was to rethink the state, and there were different ways to do this. One could rethink traditional state borders: sometimes the only solution seemed to be the redrawing of those borders, to realign imagined community with state. Another way was to rethink what a state was altogether, and to accept some form of division of sovereignty within the same state. Yet another possibility was regional cooperation between states to solve economic and conflictual problems.

The second major form of response that Keating suggested was to rethink the nation:

The challenge in many cases is how we can create societies rich in cultural, racial and religious diversity in ways which encourage rather than compromise as sense of national identity. It is too glib to say that the answer lies simply in better understanding. The problems in the Balkans or in central Africa do not stem from a lack of familiarity with the culture of the antagonists. This means that the redefinition of the nation is a complex task. It involves economic and social development, justice, human rights, good governance, inclusive

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institution-building, tolerance, respect for difference, the strengthening of civil society.\(^4\)

In defending the concept of the multicultural society, Keating extended its history back into the last century, using a language of inclusivism while, at the same time, not denying the dominance of the British (and Irish) heritage. It was the question, he argued, of how to see that the story of inclusive multiculturalism was a long one, that the dominant Australian tradition, with its tolerance, egalitarianism, and its important liberal-democratic institutions, had provided the foreground for the rise of multicultural society. On the other hand he cautioned against idealising that past, and that set of institutions. We must, he argued, use the best in those traditions as something that drives reform.

It is in this context, of the proudly diverse multicultural society, that Keating placed the Aboriginal/settler situation. The ongoing failure of this relation, and the fact of long-standing and continuing conflict between Aboriginal and settler communities, he saw as the great failure and threat to the multicultural society. However, unlike assimilationist-settler nationalists, he did not see indigenous claims as persecutory. As in Klein's depressive position, the stress is on repairing, on making what was damaged whole again. The underlying anxiety is that too much damage has been done; the other side of the constructive thinking about how to reorder the nation-state is the air of mourning and guilt, at times self-recrimination for neglect and wrongs done. "Until we succeed in our ambition to effect a permanent reconciliation with indigenous Australians," Keating argued, "our claims to have achieved a successful multicultural society will always be compromised."\(^5\) The notion of a new partnership based on mutual respect, tolerance, justice and equity, he concluded, must replace old exclusions and attempts to assimilate.

In Keating's famous, and controversial, Redfern Park speech delivered on the 10th of December 1992, he did what to many ardent nationalists was the inexcusable: he admitted in no uncertain terms that the settler national community had been capable of


committing terrible crimes against the indigenous. It is worth quoting him:

Isn’t it reasonable to say that if we can build a prosperous and remarkably harmonious multicultural society in Australia, surely we can find just solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians—the people to whom the most injustice has been done. And, as I say, the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional land and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some notable exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask—how would I feel if this were done to me? As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us.

It was exactly this frank admission that so outraged some other nationalists. In the remainder of the speech Keating explicitly argued that, in the present, settler-Australians were not driven by guilt; they were not personally responsible for the actions of others. Nevertheless, guilt is acknowledged in the past, and this has implications for the way settler-Australians should address indigenous issues. Thus guilt is not approached with fear, but in a spirit of reparation.43

In the Redfern Park speech Keating spoke of bringing Aboriginal identity and culture fully into the nation. Such a task he saw as fundamental to proving, to Australians themselves and to the world, that Australia was a first rate social democracy, that it really was “the land of the fair go and the better chance.” But he also considered this task to be a test of Australians’ self knowledge, of “how well we know the land we live in” and its history. Achieving or not achieving this task would show how “well we recognise the

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43 The same sort of reparative approach was evident in the Keating response to the issue of native title during 1993, as I will show in chapter 7.
fact that, complex as our contemporary identity is, it cannot be separated from Aboriginal Australia.” In speaking of the importance of the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples he went even further:

...to bring the dispossessed out of the shadows, to recognise that they are part of us, and that we cannot give indigenous Australians up without giving up many of our most deeply held values, much of our own identity—and our own humanity.44

When one looks at this language closely one can see elements of a process typical of this mode of nationalism: Aboriginality becomes necessary for the “healing” of white settlers.45 In Keating’s speech the explicit emphasis is on the healing of the whole nation. Importantly, the nation itself is still, in part, idealised—there is a careful avoidance of any overt condemnation of the Australian nation itself. Rather, the speech attends to the making whole of an already great though incomplete nation. The nation itself is good, and has been good to its settlers, but they—not the formation of the nation—have let their Aboriginal brothers and sisters down. The Redfern Park speech is peppered with this image of Australia as the good, just nation that Australians only have to live up to. Here is a typical example:

We non-Aboriginal Australians should perhaps remind ourselves that Australia once reached out for us. Didn’t Australia provide opportunity and care for the dispossessed Irish? The poor of Britain? The refugees from war and famine and persecution in the countries of Europe and Asia? Isn’t it reasonable to say that if we can build a prosperous and remarkably harmonious multicultural society in Australia, surely we can find just

solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians—the
people to whom the most injustice has been done...

Thus Australian nationals have been guilty of tarnishing their own
good nation object, and the only way to alleviate this guilt is
through the reparative inclusion of the indigenous.

This inclusiveness, at the same time, cements unity. The full
inclusion of the indigenous would fulfill Australia’s destiny as a true
social democracy. The indigenous join the queue with all the other
immigrant groups, except that they were also somewhat unique
because they were the “first Australians.” They were the
downtrodden who a true social democracy would make sure it
attended to, a theme Keating returned to in his “True Believers”
election victory speech, when he referred to those people the nation
would not leave behind as it blazed the trail of prosperity.46 True
inclusion of the indigenous would also help to get rid of those old
niggling doubts over whether settler Australians really belonged in
Australia:

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.

Seeing things through Aboriginal eyes is another way of saying
settlers can become indigenous. Nationalist authors like David Tacey
have made similar calls for the indigenising of settler culture.47

Nevertheless, as a form of inclusivism it can be distinguished
from the individualistic inclusivism of the other mode of
nationalism which, as I argued, was premised on the disappearance
of Aboriginal culture. Consider, for example, the following statement

46Victory speech on election night, March 13, 1993.
47David Tacey, Edge of the Sacred, 1995.
about the need for reconciliation between the indigenous and the rest of the national community, taken from an interview I conducted with “Paul”\textsuperscript{48}:

Now the one group that I feel haven’t, had, found their place in the sun to the same extent, are the Aborigines. That we don’t yet, oh well its starting to grow, but we didn’t have much respect for their culture, or acceptance of it. And I think that, that one of the things which is really starting to appear in the Australian culture, is a recognition that Aboriginal insights into land ownership, Aboriginal spirituality, and these things are so Australian, that the land here always...makes it important—imperative—that you go down that track. That somehow this land here grabs you and does that to us. And that therefore we’ve got an awful lot to learn from Aboriginal culture, and to bring it into our own expanding—culture keeps growing and developing and I think Aboriginal spirituality and Aboriginal understanding of land, of their, their own concern for the flora and fauna and so on—these have been great traditions which we can benefit from, if we absorb it, the way we absorbed Italian and Greek culture there in the post-war period. And now gradually the Muslim culture is starting to have some influence. So I, I would be hoping then that we can maintain that multiculturalism and in doing so begin to absorb more from the Aboriginal cultural heritage, which I think is very, is very strong and very deep. And its been underestimated for so long.

Notions of progress and evolution are here given up, in favour of a notion of cultural hybridity—taking the best values, and achievements of all cultures—that is given a positive value, and seen as the source of national strength. Where Paul speaks of “absorbing” this means for him something very different to the notions of absorption, merging and assimilation discussed in chapter 3. Identities are not exclusive; just as the indigenous draw now on sources provided by European cultures, so the Europeans in Australia draw upon Aboriginal culture. Nor does Paul denigrate the value or achievements of his own cultural tradition—Irish Catholic

\textsuperscript{48}The name is a synonym. The interview was conducted in 1997.
Australian—or the broader British tradition. The central strength of Australian culture, he argues elsewhere in the interview, lies in its capacity to absorb different influences and peoples, without obliterating differences. Of early Australia he says:

Now, I think that multiculturalism has gone so well in Australia because of the Irish and the Scots—and the Welsh to a lesser extent—but the Celtic peoples in Australia have maintained a cultural identity, which is different from the English one. And we were able to do that without any great tension—a little bit, the Catholic/Protestant stuff—but, the Celtic, no one was worried about the Scots parading around in kilts, or the Micks going to mass on Sunday, nobody worried about that. Or nuns walking around dressed up like Muslim women. . . used to. It was all taken for granted, that was the way it was.

Paul calls for the joining of cultures, recognizing the risks involved, but seeing no other way in a world never free from violence and conflict, or their potential. The land becomes the source of national values, the common inheritance. Importantly, it is not that the value of cohesiveness is denied—Paul for example sees it as fundamentally important that all who live within Australia have a commitment to some unifying value, basically a commitment to respecting other cultures and a commitment to holding the society together—it is just that the solution offered by the assimilationists is found wanting. Of Blainey’s view Paul says:

...I agree with Blainey on cohesiveness, I, I mean I never had any great problems with Blainey’s speech, I, I felt that what he was saying was an important point, I just disagreed with him, and the way you solve it is by. . .[It was the cohesiveness that as an issue, it was really the way he thought about that cohesiveness?] Yes, and also the fact that he put up a barrier to stop any more migration. That, that he was trying to freeze things, as if you can freeze cultural development—I don’t think you can. You could in the old days when people didn’t travel, when people didn’t intermarry, but all that’s changed.

A similar concept of the Australian nation, and of the place of the indigenous within it, is invoked in the writings of the Catholic priest and advocate of Aboriginal land rights and reconciliation, Fr.
Frank Brennan. The title of one of his recent books—*One Land, One Nation*—is a rephrasing of Barton’s “a nation for a continent, a continent for a nation,” and the book itself is a reworking of the notion of “one people, one destiny” to incorporate an acceptance of cultural diversity absent from the original formulation. He calls for a real and lasting reconciliation between settler and indigenous Australians, a form of joining that allows a degree of ongoing cultural/political separation. He conceives of reconciliation as the erection of a bridge over a river on either side of which stand two peoples. “Across such a bridge,” he argued “...the brave and fine could constitute ‘one land, one nation’ in which black and white entwined are free.”\(^{49}\) Reconciliation, Brennan argues, will involve the “owning of the past” by non-Aboriginal people, a past that includes terrible wrongs done to the original inhabitants of the land. His vision of entwinement in the one nation suggests that each culture would enrich the other and thus the nation erected over them.

The fusing of Aboriginal with non-Aboriginal identities under the umbrella of the one nation is highly desirable for indigenising settler-nationalists because, within this discourse, the settler self can not do without the Aborigine. In the preface to an earlier book, Brennan stated that his book was written in the hope “that Aborigines might belong again throughout this land; and those of us who are not Aboriginal might belong for the first time without shame.”\(^{50}\) Aborigines perform an important redemptive function: only Aborigines can forgive the sins of the past. But the nation cannot let Aborigines go—secession is not what Brennan means by self-determination, otherwise he would not insist upon the notion of ‘one people’—because the settler-nation needs the Aborigines in order to legitimate its connection with the land, and thus to give the nation itself legitimacy in the region. The stress on entwinement expresses an underlying wish that the settler national self will become indigenised and so a true and legitimate heir to the land. In calling for constitutional recognition for Aborigines as the original owners of the land, and guaranteeing them a place in the

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democratic process, Brennan is not only extending justice to them; he aims to strengthen the nation, and to give all settlers a more secure national identity:

It would be better for all Australians, on both sides of the river, if we could go into the next millennium committed to the legitimacy of "one land, one nation." Our shared commitment to the nation would forge a strong identity and a secure place for all who belong on this continent.  

A notion that he has repeatedly returned to in his writings is that Aborigines are the custodians of the only culture unique to this land. His nationalism requires a grafting of this unique culture on to one Australian identity. He argues that actual recognition of Aborigines as the inheritors and original owners of the land, and as custodians of this unique culture, is important for Aborigines but also for all Australians. "Such recognition" he claims "would consolidate the national identity of all Australians."

The call for true reconciliation between Aborigines and non-Aborigines is couched in terms of historical justice, but also of national cohesion. It is important to note, however, that unlike the response to unity and cohesion of assimilationist settler-nationalism, which called for a retreat to former positions and the principled stand on all issues, here cohesion is viewed as a positive challenge, and calls for new ways of thinking and ordering the relations between peoples. For example, in Brennan’s discourse it becomes imperative that Aboriginal demands are met within the nation, not simply ruled out, otherwise the threat of segregation might become a reality, which in Brennan’s view would be bad for everyone. Reconciliation means a strengthening of the nation-state, in terms of its legitimacy, the country’s economic future and social stability. The threat of disunity is recognised, but is not a pervasive fear.

Finally, though indigenising settler-nationalism continues to speak in the name of the nation, the sense of a shared national culture is residual. Really what is understood by nation is a sense of

common humanity and commonality of destiny due to coexistence within the same territory. When Brennan speaks of the nation he clearly means something different to what Blainey means. It is an open-ended notion which can accommodate a level of diversity which only gives way at a certain point. Diversity, and its counterpart of particular rights enjoyed by distinct peoples, does give way however, and this is the limit which the indigenous must negotiate and decide on. If it limits their aspirations in a way they find intolerable—the question remains open—then the nation becomes oppressive. The difficulties involved here can not be overemphasised.

Implications of the Two Modes of Settler-Nationalism For Indigenous/Settler Relations

Assimilationist settler-nationalism can not abide fluidity, doubt, an open-ended future. It is couched in either/or language. Thus Sir Paul Hasluck, in determining that there is no justification for separate treatment of Aborigines, speculates:

Looking to the future, the basic questions to be faced are whether Australians of Aboriginal origin are to live together with other Australians, or apart from them; are they to have the same opportunities or different opportunities; are they to bear the same responsibilities and be subject to the same laws or are they to be regarded as a ‘lesser breed’ from whom less should be required? Is Australia to have one society or two societies?54

There is no suggestion of finding a third solution, like some form of coexistence. One must be able to say, or know, what the nation is and is not, and one must fix the relations between its various members to each other, and to the administrative centre once and for all. The nation here performs a specific function: it serves as a social defence mechanism against primarily paranoid anxieties. Assimilationist settler-nationalism is not blind to the turning of the tide of history. Quite the opposite: its paranoia can throw the dilemmas of that turning into sharp relief. It is only too well aware of the extreme difficulty involved in bringing into its nationalism—

54Paul Hasluck, *Shades of Darkness*, p. 143.
and the national image it relies upon—an Aboriginality that was the polar opposite out of which a white Australian identity had been constituted. Moreover, it responds to what it sees as the rewriting of Australia’s history by arguing explicitly that the construction of a “worthy past” is essential to the development and retention of national feeling sufficient to hold the country together.

And yet, despite the hope for national integrity based on a notion of cultural homogeneity that infuses this discourse, difference can not be expelled entirely. Aboriginal difference remains as a troubling presence—more troubling than the presence of those “yet-to-be-assimilated” ethnic groups who form “enclaves” in the nation. To the extent that Aborigines express their difference they are divisive, and a threat to the integrity of the nation. Because this mode of nationalism is driven by a fear of difference, the persistence of distinct Aboriginal identities, or any other “non-Australian” ethnic identities, is greeted with a paranoid response. The difference is at once denied, as a defensive procedure, and at the same time “protagonists” or “agitators” are blamed for stirring it up, or even creating it for their own naive or evil purposes. The effect is to demand a principled stand, rather than to negotiate a new political constellation answering to the needs of different identities co-existing in the same territory.

The discourse of Aboriginality evident in assimilationist settler-nationalism is an example of what Patrick Wolfe has termed repressive authenticity, which, in setting up a polarity of real and inauthentic Aboriginality, enables a “logic of elimination” to gain ideological expression, canceling out any rights Aborigines who survived the process of physical extermination might have had. “Repressive authenticity,” Wolfe argues, “should . . . be understood in relation to the threat posed by a multiplex, heterogeneous and,

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55 In this respect, one should note Alasdair Davidson’s point about the early penal laws which declared “wandering with blacks” a serious offence in early colonial times, when the emergent state was seeking to create reformed citizens out of a convict mass. See A. Davidson, The Invisible State, 1991, p. 88.

56 Bain Attwood makes this point in his characterisation of ‘conservative history,’ a characterisation which in several respects is similar to my assimilationist mode. See “Mabo, Australia and the End of History,” 1996, p. 103.
above all, historical set of Aboriginalities which refuse to be contained within the ideal polarity that the logic of elimination requires.” Refusal to acknowledge the historical diversity of contemporary Aboriginal identities is used as a way to delegitimize the most politically effective and articulate Aborigines.

The argument that Aboriginal and settler cultures occupied different and incompatible positions on the scale of evolutionary time can be used against those in the present who seek to maintain aspects of a lifestyle from a “surpassed time”; they would stand in the way of human progress. Aboriginal land rights thus appear as an anachronism in the face of modernity; Blainey expresses his own incredulity at a modern nation’s willingness to embrace the idea. This ideology of time can be used, in a rephrasing of the *terra nullius* doctrine, to cancel out past Aboriginal property rights and therefore any property rights of Aborigines in the present that rely upon them. In effect, then, the European invasion is not dispossession at all, logically speaking; for to be dispossessed of something one must at least own it first. As the Hon Peter Connolly, QC put it:

If the right to carry on all of these [hunter gathering] activities is to be included in “native title”, it is still difficult to see in

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57 Patrick Wolfe, “Nation and Miscegenation,” p. 118. For an argument against the whole land rights movement, based on the claim that only the “racially pure” tribal Aborigines had a legitimate traditional claim on land, see Peter B. English, *Land Rights and Birth-Rights (The Great Australian Hoax)*, 1985. In his view any indigenous person fathered by a white was not a real Aborigine and had no traditional rights to land because, he asserted, such claims ran on paternal lines in Aboriginal society. See p. 198.

58 My interviewee “Les” made extensive use of the split between the “pure-blood tribal Aborigine” and the “inauthentic” “half-breed.” He referred to the latter as the “shandy people,” and argued that they had little or no Aboriginal culture and were the real “stirrers,” “activists” and “troublemakers.” Important Aboriginal leaders like Charles Perkins did not represent the legitimate voice or interests of Aborigines (who only seemed to exist in the outback) because not “fully” Aboriginal—Perkins, argued Les, “claims he’s an Aboriginal and looks as white as I am.”

this [Native Title] legislation any basis for suggesting that they were deprived by white settlement of anything other than the right to carry on the activities of paleolithic man. In particular, they did not mine the earth.\textsuperscript{60}

Connolly argued against the very concept of “native title” as it emerged in the High Court ruling on Mabo, and in the subsequent native title legislation. The Murray islanders, he claimed, were “millennia ahead of the paleolithics in terms of social organisation”. As non-nomadic, socially organised cultivators of the land, they might have had some property rights at the time of colonisation. The Aborigines of the Australian mainland, on the other hand, never had any such rights.\textsuperscript{61}

Even if such rights can be shown to have a level of continuity according to legal doctrine, assimilationist settler-nationalism can find reason to cancel them. The Liberal Senator Rod Kemp, echoing the voices of many during the debate on the Mabo decision and native title in the Federal Senate, warned of the disintegrative effects of any concessions on specific rights for the indigenous. He claimed to reflect the concern of the public:

\ldots I think that there is concern amongst Australians who have the desire to remain—perhaps to use the words of the federation fathers—‘one people with one destiny.’ I think certain aspects of the debate have emerged which may perhaps suggest that the founding vision of this nation possibly may be compromised, unless the government ensures that the decisions which are taken reinforce the desire of Australians to be one people and one nation. Certainly, I believe that anything which smacks of creating special rights and privileges for particular groups will be strongly resisted by most Australians.\textsuperscript{62}

Questions of justice for the indigenous, even if they could be cogently formulated, are hereby ruled out by the desire for there to

\textsuperscript{60}The Honourable Peter Connolly, QC, in “The High Court of Australia in Mabo”, pp. 5-6.

\textsuperscript{61}Peter Connolly, “The High Court of Australia in Mabo”, pp. 7-9.

be “one nation in one continent.” The past as represented by the patriarchal “founding fathers” sanctifies the desire, and in this instance, cancels out all concession on the question of Aboriginal land rights.

One needs to recognise two interrelated elements of the “nation for a continent, a continent for a nation” ideology. On the one hand there is the strategic argument that the climate of international relations suggests that the entity of the Australian nation-state can only be preserved and defended for as long as its central agency, the federal government, expressing the sovereignty of all co-nationals, has full administrative control over all lands deemed Australian territory; otherwise, the persecutors (“foreign interests”) will make inroads into and undermine the national community. Blainey speaks of “corridors” within the nation being created by Aboriginal land rights, suggesting they might provide the avenue for those potentially persecuting foreign interests to travel into the country. The strategic “realist” argument is thus overlaid and infused with fears and anxieties that mark the inner world, including the more persecutory ones central to the paranoid-schizoid position. The nation covering the continent, thus conceived, has become an institutional form that contains persecutory anxieties, and helps them to be managed. A threat to that national form raises the threat that those anxieties will be unleashed.

Concepts of the nation and identities tend to be more fluid within indigenising settler-nationalism; notions of Aboriginal self-determination and autonomy, including a notion of Aboriginal land rights can be entertained. But these rights have their limit in a notion of the boundary of the nation as a single community. This has implications for Aboriginal aspiration. The tension in this form of nationalism is between the claim to treat Aborigines as original Australians, conferring upon them distinct symbolic value and rights deriving from their indigenous status, and the claim that they at the same time be treated as members of one Australian nation. Brennan elaborates upon various constitutional forms through which recognition and rights might be given to Aborigines, but these have their limit in a conception of the common good and the national interest. Where the good of national stability is at stake, these Aboriginal rights might evaporate. Referring to the
Aboriginal right to self-determination he argues that Aboriginal communities have the right to manage their own affairs:

... as autonomously as possible within the Australian nation provided they do not interfere with the rights of others, and provided all community members are given a realistic choice between their community life and the lifestyle available to other Australians.\textsuperscript{63}

The confrontation between belonging to an Aboriginal community and belonging to the national community is assessed on a case by case basis, and not in absolute terms. Two examples he refers to are forced marriage of young girls with older men in accordance with tribal law, and tribal initiation. Belonging not only to an Aboriginal community but to the national community means that these Aboriginal girls, and young Aborigines facing initiation, have the right to exercise a choice.\textsuperscript{64} Similarly, Aboriginal land and other cultural rights are recognised but limited by the belonging of Aborigines to a common nation, the interest of which, though in many instances coinciding with the recognition of indigenous rights, at some point supersedes them.

The pluralist society in which Aborigines are to find a place is ultimately set up on the terms of the liberal democracy of the settler society, with some recognition of Aboriginal difference, and a commitment that Aborigines be given a real political say in those “shared” institutions. The recognition and acceptance of rights attaching to difference is however provisional and because granted by the nation-state, can also be legitimately taken away. It is expected that this will only rarely be the case, and assumed that the conflict of aspirations will be minimal, if the nation-state is flexible and accommodating rather than rigid in approach. Brennan, and others who speak from within indigenising settler-nationalism, attempt to hold together two different views of indigenous rights: the first is that Aborigines have certain cultural rights within a pluralist nation. This is well in keeping with one strand of

\textsuperscript{63} Sharing the Country, p. 6. He makes the same point in his introduction to Reconciling Our Differences, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{64}“From Terra Nullius to Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal Rights”, p. 47.
liberalism, articulated by Will Kymlicka and others, which can defend the idea of collective cultural rights because these are seen as important resources for the individual. On the other hand there is the rather vague claim that Aborigines have a special status and particular rights as first people. It is the former conception that predominates, and which is called upon whenever a cogent formulation of the common interests of the nation are seen to take precedence. Aboriginal land rights can exist now because there is, at present, a stronger moral claim to certain lands by Aborigines. But Brennan warns that this may not be so in the future. In a statement remarkably similar, at least at face value, to Blainey's utilitarian justification for the dispossession of the Aborigines, Brennan updates this to focus on possible futures, and adds a Christian tint:

There is no moral argument to say that any Aboriginal community, however small or dissipated it becomes, will forever or should forever be the owners of their traditional land. The creation is for the good and enjoyment of all. As Australians we have to face the fact that in an increasingly overcrowded world we retain exclusive use of too many of the world's resources.

It is questionable whether this conception of Aboriginal land rights is shared by many indigenous people.

But one final difference between the two modes of settler-nationalism needs to be stressed. Within indigenising settler-nationalism the question of Aboriginal self-determination and the various forms that it takes does not become something that all loyal Australians should strive to repress or overcome. The desire is still for a single unified state, nation or society—the three terms are frequently used interchangeably—but it is not an absolute principle. Again Brennan can be seen as exemplary. He argues that for most Aborigines the desire seems to be to remain in the Australian nation-state, while exercising as much self-determination as possible. Secondly, since those Aborigines living in the closely

65 See for example Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Citizenship, 1995.
67 Sharing the Country, p. 155.
settled areas, forming a small minority among other peoples, do not have the basis to form a separate society—neither the institutions nor the land base—sovereign nation status seems an impossible dream. However, he does not rule out completely the possibility of Aborigines living, for example, in Arnhem Land, and especially Torres Strait Islanders, forming separate nations at some time in the future, if that was their desire. He argues that at present the inhabitants of these places seek more autonomy within the Australian Commonwealth, and though this is clearly his preferred position, the fact that future separation can even be countenanced, reveals the distinction between this mode of nationalism and assimilationist settler-nationalism.

Having set out my two modes of settler-nationalism I now want to begin to make use of them, in the next three chapters, to understand settler/indigenous relations at the political level in the period from the 1960s to the present.

68 "From Terra Nullius to Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal Rights", p. 47.
Chapter Five: The “exquisite difficulty” of Aboriginal Land Rights

In this chapter and the following two chapters I have chosen certain key historical moments through which to explore the impact of the different modes of settler-nationalism upon settler/indigenous relations. The land question has been of central importance within that set of relations, and for this reason I have focused upon different historical phases of the political struggle over Aboriginal land rights. In this chapter I reconstruct the events leading up to the enactment of Australia’s first Aboriginal land rights legislation. I examine the political arguments used to justify that legislation, in the light of the breakdown of the hegemony of assimilationist settler-nationalism at the end of the 1960s. In chapter 6 I examine the ALP’s ill-fated attempt to extend Aboriginal land rights nationally, in the context of a resurgence of assimilationist settler-nationalism among conservatives, in the early to mid 1980s. In chapter 7 I examine the transformation of the political terrain brought about by the 1992 Mabo ruling of the High Court. This transformation involved: the restaging of the ALP’s national Aboriginal land rights agenda through the pursuit, by the Keating Labor Government, of native title legislation; the conservative Howard Government’s alteration of the Native Title Act, partly stimulated by the High Court’s 1996 Wik decision; and the rise of a new conservative movement, headed by Pauline Hanson, that pitted itself against the shift from assimilationist Aboriginal policy since the early 1970s.

The Achievement of Aboriginal Land Rights

Aboriginal land rights, as we understand them today, entered the political and public agenda at a national level in the 1960s as part of a broader movement for Aboriginal rights and, increasingly, self-determination. This emergence to public prominence of the previously submerged, but continuous and persistent, Aboriginal
demands for justice and land rights was stimulated by a change of political climate in the post war period, and by the important actions of Aboriginal communities and leaders, frequently provoked by the repressive actions of governments and/or mining and pastoral interests. Organisations like the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) had been active since the 1950s. FCAATSI provided a focus for Aboriginal aspiration and a grounding in political expertise, through individual and collective dealing with governments, bureaucracies, the media and the public. FCAATSI also brought together Aborigines from a wide range of situations and provided a sense of collective interest, and a breeding ground for astute Aboriginal leaders. The momentum grew for land rights among Aboriginal people and their supporters after the 1967 Referendum; FCAATSI played an important role in promoting and achieving the latter, and was involved in the campaign for land rights. The many other organisations involved in the fight for Aboriginal rights, including several that were Aboriginal led, and had been active since the 1920s and 1930s, were equally important.

The actions of state and federal governments in the 1950s and 1960s in relation to mining on traditional Aboriginal lands stimulated Aboriginal resistance, and increased the awareness of Aborigines, and their supporters in the settler community, of the


2See Faith Bandler, Turning the Tide, 1989, passim. At the end of the book Bandler includes a series of reflections, by prominent Aborigines, upon their experience of FCAATSI. Originally titled the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines (FCAA) this organisation was set up in 1957, with participation from many societies, trade union representatives and unions, and indigenous people. See Judith Wright, We Call for a Treaty, pp. 3-4.

3The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA), with an almost entirely Aboriginal membership, emerged in New South Wales in the 1920s. For a discussion of its activities and influence see Heather Goodall, Invasion to Embassy, ch 12, and Jack Horner, Vote Ferguson, passim.
need to gain secure title to their remaining traditional lands. In 1963 the federal Government excised a large tract of land from the Arnhem Land reserve for the mining of recently discovered bauxite on the Gove peninsula. This action sparked off the battle of the Yirrkala people for their land, and resulted in the symbolically potent bark petition of 1963 signed by Yirrkala elders, a government inquiry, and in the Yirrkala people’s failed but politically important Supreme Court challenge.\(^4\) After significant bauxite deposits were discovered in the 1940s and 1950s in Cape York Peninsula, the Queensland Government granted rights to mineral leases to companies over lands within the Weipa and Mapoon reserves. As events played themselves out in the late 1960s, in a series of complex negotiations between mining companies, church missionaries and the Queensland Government, Aborigines and their interests were largely overlooked. There was a public outcry at the treatment of Aborigines on these reserves by the Queensland Government and the mining companies, and protests from Aboriginal organisations and trade unions. The forced removal of Aboriginal families from Mapoon under armed guard in November 1963,\(^5\) after a long battle of attrition and starvation of the mission of funding and infrastructural support, was an instance of spectacular injustice that received widespread media coverage, spilling into national and international forums, including protests and a petition from the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA) to the United Nations, and acted as a powerful symbol for Aborigines of continuing colonial repression. Similarly, the Queensland government’s relocation of Weipa village in the mid 1960s, at Comalco’s request, to make way for the mine, which Comalco argued was in the interests of Aborigines themselves to

\(^4\)See Milirrpum and others v. Nabalco Pty Ltd and the Commonwealth of Australia (1971). For a personal account of this series of events, from a member of the Yolgnu, see Galarrwuy Yunupingu “We Know These Things To Be True”, 1998. The text of the bark petition sent to Federal Parliament (House of Representatives) is reproduced in Henry Reynolds (compiler) Dispossession, 1989, pp. 85-6.

\(^5\)For ewewitness accounts, see Mapoon—Book One: The Mapoon Story by the Mapoon People, 1975.
protect them from the white township and to aid their gradual assimilation into white society, was a public controversy.

Two of the most potent acts of resistance from Aborigines, reaching national and international audiences, were the Aboriginal walk-off strikes in the Northern Territory from 1966, and the Aboriginal Tent Embassy which rose sporadically outside the old parliament house in Canberra between 1972 and 1975.6 The dramatic 1966 walk-off of the Gurindji people, and their claim for an area of their traditional land—500 square miles at Kalgaringi (Wattie Creek)7—to use for their own purposes, received national attention and resulted in vigorous parliamentary debate. Involved in the Gurindji dispute was the broader question of white dominance, including sexual dominance over Aboriginal communities, and the desire for rights to their traditional lands.8 The Aboriginal Tent Embassy, first set up by four Aborigines on the 26th of January 1972, was a direct response to Prime Minister McMahon’s speech a day earlier which, in the face of rising and

6See C.D. Rowley, “The Aboriginal Embassy”, 1978. As Rowley points out, there were a series of walk-offs from 1966, including those from Newcastle Waters and from Helen Springs. See The Remote Aborigines, pp. 337-43. Nevertheless, it was the Wave Hill walk-off that really captured the public’s imagination, and came to symbolise the struggle, not only for industrial equality, but for land rights. In Western Australia, with the help of non-indigenous spokesman and organiser Don McLeod, Aboriginal pastoral workers fed up with little or no pay, poor conditions and bad treatment by pastoralists, walked off the stations in 1946, beginning a strike that lasted for decades. For a first-hand account see Don McLeod How the West Was Lost, 1984. See also the novelistic account of these events in Donald Stuart, Yandy, 1959.


increasingly articulate Aboriginal demands for land rights, justice and respect for Aboriginal cultural forms and beliefs, pledged a continuation of assimilationist policies (though tempered by notions of gradual integration). The McMahon Government’s release of a fourteen page statement on land rights policy was a great disappointment to Aboriginal people, who had been expecting a shift from previous policy. In place of Aboriginal land rights, the McMahon Government pledged specially designed 50 year leases that would be available for Aboriginal people to apply for over reserve lands. However, such grants were dependent upon proof of social and economic viability. The statement presented an argument against the attempt “to translate the Aboriginal affinity with the land into some form of legal right under the Australian system,” since this “would introduce a new and probably confusing component, the implications of which could not clearly be foreseen, and which could lead to uncertainty and possible challenge in relation to land titles elsewhere in Australia which are at present unquestioned and secure.”

The discussion and debate preceding the statement, and the strong recommendation from the Council for Aboriginal Affairs (CAA) that land rights should be granted, a position McMahon

9In a talk reflecting on the 1967 Referendum, Gary Foley emphasised the great disappointment Aborigines had felt listening to McMahon’s speech, and how it had been the important catalyst for the tent embassy. At a forum entitled More than a Piece of Paper: the right to be counted, (Celebration of the 30th anniversary of the referendum), at the Koori Student and Liaison Unit, Carlton Melbourne, May 1997. On the embassy see Faith Bandler, Turning the Tide; Roberta Sykes Black Majority: an analysis of 21 years of Black Australian experience as emancipated Australian citizens, 1989, pp. 93-7; C.D. Rowley “The Aboriginal Embassy”; and Judith Wright, We Call for a Treaty, pp. 13-18.

10See Commonwealth of Australia, “Australian Aborigines. Commonwealth Policy and Achievements”, Statement by the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon. William McMahon, C.H.M.P., 26 January 1972. See also “General Leases Planned to Aid Aboriginals”, The Australian, January 26, 1972, p. 4. It was reported in The Australian ( January 2, 1972, p. 3) that the statement would be embarrassing to McMahon who had seemed to favour land rights, on advice from his personal advisor Coombs.
himself seemed to favour, had raised Aboriginal expectations.11 As a symbolic gesture the Tent Embassy expressed the Aboriginal experience of being aliens in their own lands. It became a focal point and meeting place for indigenous people from all over Australia, concentrating their awareness of the commonality of their plight as the indigenous oppressed, rather than simply the racially unequal. The articulation of Aboriginal politics as the quest for specific indigenous rights was an important development during the 1960s. The indigenous assertion of distinct and, in some respects, separate identity and rights stemming from original ownership rocked multi-racial organisations like FAACTSI that were more committed, at least on the part of their non-indigenous members and leaders, to the acquiring of equal rights for an Aboriginal racial minority, along the lines of the American Civil Rights Movement.12

The 1960s and early 1970s was a period of political and cultural change and turmoil, which included not only political unrest from the indigenous, with petitions for land and treaties, the Charles Perkins’ led 1965 freedom rides through rural New South Wales to highlight the exclusion of Aborigines from civic life, street demonstrations and other struggles against continuing state oppression, but the rise of the feminist movement and widespread protest against the Vietnam War. The 1970s heralded the first federal Labor Government since 1949, with a programme of radical reform that included a considerable emphasis on rectifying the wrong done to Aborigines, signaled by statements from Gough Whitlam as Opposition leader and then as Prime Minister from December 1972. The repositioning of the ALP on Aboriginal issues represented the embracing by key sections of the Party and its

11See “MPs’ in Dilemma over Land Rights”, The Australian, January 2, 1972, p. 3. The CAA was set up by Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1967 to advise on Aboriginal affairs. Its three members were Dr. H.C.L. Coombs, Mr. Barrie Dexter (previous Ambassador to Laos) and Professor W.E.H. Stanner. See Judith Wright, We Call for a Treaty, pp. 4-5. Wright also discusses the CAA’s advice on land rights and McMahon’s initial favouring of that advice, pp. 11-14. For Coombs’ personal account see his Kulinma, pp. 11-16.

leadership of indigenising settler-nationalism. In several speeches Whitlam put Aboriginal affairs at the centre of a renewed nationalism that called for a long overdue resolution of the racial divide and its attendant problems. In 1968 he had argued, in parliament, that the overwhelming public endorsement of the changes to the constitution in the 1967 referendum reflected a desire on the part of the Australian people to improve the situation of Aborigines, and to grant them land rights. A few years later he argued that the historic rectification of wrongs done to Aborigines was a pressing concern for Australia: to the extent that colonial Australia came to a rapprochement with its Aboriginal people would it be judged as a fair nation in the eyes of the rest of the world. At his election policy speech of the 13th of November 1972, he said:

Let us never forget this: Australia’s real test as far as the rest of the world, and particularly our region, is concerned is the role we create for our own Aborigines. In this sense, and it is a very real sense, the Aborigines are our true link with our region. More than any foreign aid program, more than any international obligation which we meet or forfeit, more than any part we may play in any treaty or agreement or alliance, Australia’s treatment of her Aboriginal people will be the thing upon which the rest of the world will judge Australia and Australians—not just now, but in the greater perspective of history. . . The Aborigines are a responsibility we cannot escape, cannot shuffle off; the world will not let us forget that.  

He stated that the Labor Party would legislate for Aboriginal land rights “not just because their case is beyond argument, but because all of us as Australians are diminished while the Aboriginals are denied their rightful place in this nation.”

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15 These words would be echoed later by many indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in relation to native title. Quoted by Mr. Les Johnson, MHR, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, *CPD, HR*, October 16, 1975, p. 2223. Scott Bennett notes that a crucial change in ALP policy came with the 1971
The successful introduction of the first land rights legislation to be enacted in Australia—the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*—highlights the emergence to dominance at the political level of indigenising settler-nationalism; this dominance was, however, tentative and ambivalently held to in the major political parties whose combined efforts brought it about. One of the leading non-Aboriginal figures at the heart of Aboriginal politics, Nugget Coombs, argued that at the political level a deep ideological division emerged in the 1960s between those non-Aborigines who supported “assimilation” and those who supported “integration.”

An early indication of this division can be gauged from the parliamentary response to the Gurindji walk-off. At first the Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs Bill Wentworth, after visiting the Gurindji at Wattie Creek in April 1968, suggested that they might be given a small part of the land they asked for (because of economic need rather than traditional rights of ownership), but his proposal was refused by Cabinet on July 2 1968. It had become clear that the Gurindji were claiming platform, which set out an agenda for land rights for traditional or tribal Aborigines already occupying their lands, or where traditional association of such tribally coherent and traditionally oriented groups could be established anthropologically. See *Aborigines and Political Power*, 1989, p. 32.

16I recognise here that other forms of land ownership were enacted in the name of Aboriginal trusts before 1976 in various states, but as Scott Bennett has pointed out, these were not land rights in the sense of inalienable rights to land. The earlier examples he points to were the *Aboriginal Lands Trust Act* (1966) of South Australia; Victoria’s *Aboriginal Lands Act* (1970) vesting freehold title in the residents of the Framlingham and Lake Tyers reserves; and the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act* (1972) in Western Australia. See Scott Bennett, *Aborigines and Political Power*, 1989, pp. 29-30.


18The Government’s own advisory body the CAA, when called upon to give advice on the Gurindji claims, had advised the setting up of procedures to examine land claims by Aboriginal groups where these were based on traditional association. This advice was rejected by Cabinet. See Coombs *Kulinma*, pp. 162-3; Judith Wright, *We Call for a Treaty*, pp. 7-8. In his diary entry for July 2, 1968 Peter Howson, the Liberal politician and (from May 31, 1971) Minister for Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, refers to the
“traditional” land around Wattie Creek which they believed belonged to them by birthright. As I pointed out in my introduction, they had petitioned the Governor General for the land in 1967, arguing their claim in terms of traditional ownership and the desire to develop economic enterprises. In parliament the Labor Opposition argued that the Gurindji should be given title to the land that they asked for, but the Coalition Government refused to grant the request—the Gurindji would be given some land, but not the specific land they wanted. This was a major point of contention in the parliamentary debate of August 9 1968, brought on by Whitlam. Several members of the Opposition argued that the Gurindji should be granted the land on the grounds of their spiritual connection with it, and not in accordance with its infrastructural or economic viability. The Government disagreed. Peter Nixon, The Minister for the Interior, agreed with Whitlam that it would be the easier solution for the Government to grant their request but that the Government “took what was in fact the harder course and what it believes to be the course that is proper and right, not only for the Aboriginal people but for Australia as a whole.”

In a Ministerial Statement that Nixon had incorporated into Hansard he gave a detailed explanation of the Government response:

The Government is in favour of Aboriginaels gaining title to land but believes that this should be under the land tenure system which applies to the rest of the community and under conditions which will give them real prospects of improving their position in life.

The minister pointed out that the Government supported economic development of Aboriginal communities through the establishment of viable enterprises on land. This was in accordance with assimilationist ideology:

conflict between Wentworth and the rest of Cabinet over Wentworth’s proposals. See Peter Howson The Howson Diaries, 1984, pp. 432-34. See also Gough Whitlam’s speech in CPD, HR, August 13, 1968, pp. 15-17. He quotes from newspaper articles reporting on Wentworth’s visit and commitments to the strikers.
Government policies are directed towards the objective of the assimilation of Aboriginal Australians as fully effective members of a single Australian society. The Government wishes to avoid measures which are likely to set Aboriginal citizens permanently apart from other Australians through having their development based on separate or different standards.

At the conclusion of his statement he emphasised that Aboriginal land tenure was not about traditional ownership or spiritual connection, but about what was necessary for the economic and social uplift of Aborigines:

Land rights should be regarded not as an end in themselves but a means to an end. The ultimate end the Government seeks is full participation by Aboriginals with other Australians in the life of a single Australian community.

In any case, he argued, the fact was that the Aboriginal leaders themselves who he had spoken with did not really understand the idea of land rights but had been stirred up by white agitators. Thus, for the Government, at issue were the commitment to indivisible national sovereignty and the adherence to the ideology of assimilation.

For an insight into the ideological underpinnings of this way of understanding the rights and interests of the indigenous in land one can fruitfully return to Hasluck. In 1952 there was a parliamentary debate on the new Welfare Ordinance to be introduced in the Northern Territory. One of the new provisions was to enable the breaking down of the Aboriginal reserves when the Government saw fit to do so, and to make excisions in reserves to enable mining activities to be carried out. Hasluck’s central argument was that the indigenous no longer needed the land because of the impact of colonisation. This involved, he argued, the voluntary relinquishment of traditions and of land as a result of the inherent appeal for the indigenous of a superior culture or civilisation, and the development of new desires and aspirations through racial contact. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, Aboriginal identity is essentialised in such discourse, and as it evaporates through contact with “higher civilisation”, all rights attaching to that identity dissolve. The way that this ideology effects dispossession, and at the same time denies

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that any dispossession is taking place, is revealed in the following passage:

What happens when they move from their tribal grounds is not dispossession in the sense of taking away something which continues to be essential. The Aborigines do not need land in the same sense that it is necessary for them to have a plot of land to cultivate because, in their transitional state, they have no understanding of the art of cultivation. There is no point in talking of restoring their possessions. To do so would involve turning them back into the bush. The need is to give to them a new possession, and I agree with the honourable member for Mackellar (Mr. Wentworth) that there is an obligation on us to give land and show them how to use it, and to provide for them employment and a place in the community. It is not enough just to declare their citizenship or to educate them, or to look after their health. We must give to them a place where they can live, and we must provide them with means to earn a living. However, when we do that, we do not restore an ancient possession, because their only ancient possession was a hunting ground. Rather do we provide them with a new possession in a new community, and bring them to a way of life that is novel to them.¹⁹

Thus the indigenous had no rights in land except those that the Government chose, in its benevolence, to give them. This same welfarist ideology stood behind the assumption evident in Nixon's claim that it was the right of Government to decide when, where and for what purposes land should be granted to the indigenous, since in moving into a new nation the indigenous were deemed to have lost any rights that related to their old communities, laws and traditions.

The stalemate between the Gurindji and the Government dragged on until the official handing back of the lands to the Gurindji leader Vincent Lingiari by Gough Whitlam on August 16 1975, after the Federal Government had bought a section of the Vestey's lease. At the ceremony Whitlam said:

Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof, in Australian law, that these lands belong to the Gurindji people and I put into your hands this piece of the earth itself as a sign that we restore them to you and your children forever.

The implication is clear from these words that the form of ownership of these lands, though written in Australian legal terms, was an important symbolic recognition of traditional Aboriginal land rights, and in fact at odds with prevailing Australian legal ruling on traditional Aboriginal title—that there was no such thing according to British and Australian law. It was both a recognition of the continuing legitimacy of traditional Aboriginal ownership, and a recognition of the need for a restoration of rights. In the same statement Whitlam claimed to “give back to you formally in Aboriginal and Australian law ownership of this land of your fathers.”

What was to become the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 was introduced as a bill by the Whitlam Government in 1975 as an effort to implement the key recommendations of the Woodward Commission. The Whitlam government had appointed Justice A.E. Woodward as its first Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner in February 1973. He had represented the Aboriginal plaintiffs before Justice Blackburn when they had attempted, and failed, to establish their ownership of tribal lands in the Gove Peninsula (Milirrpum v Nabalco Pty Ltd and the Commonwealth of Australia, 1971). The failure of this case was the immediate impetus for setting up the Woodward Commission; Woodward was directed to head an inquiry into land rights with a directive not to see whether they should be implemented but how they could be implemented in the Northern Territory. This Labor Party commitment to grant land rights to Aborigines in federal territories was based on a number of criteria, including traditional or spiritual association and the needs of fringe dwellers, and as a form of compensation for dispossession; but it was also underpinned

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21 The mining industry claimed that this directive meant the Commission’s inquiry could not be objective. See Australian Mining Industry Council (AMIC), “Aboriginal Land Rights; the need for a national consensus”, 1982.
by a nationalist rationale. The Governmental discourse of land rights was from the beginning linked to the state and quality of the nation.

This can be seen from an examination of Woodward’s important second report, which paved the way for the granting of land rights to Aborigines in the Northern Territory, and which served as a key framing device and benchmark for future proposals for land rights. Woodward, in his introduction and elsewhere in the report, argued that non-Aboriginal Australians needed to recognise and accept that Aboriginal spiritual connection to place was central to Aboriginal identity, and therefore that land occupation, in particular circumstances, was a necessary precondition for Aboriginal well-being, cultural survival, and continuing development as a people. He argued that non-Aborigines must engage in a real consultation with Aborigines over these issues, and that they must recognise and respect Aboriginal decision-making processes and notions of Aboriginal self-determination. Yet these considerations were subject to a notion of the common “national interest” which stood above Aboriginal interests, and to which the latter must give way when there was a genuine conflict between them. Thus Woodward argued that any land rights legislation must be concerned with making sure Aboriginal interests and rights were not whittled away without Aboriginal consent “except where the national interest positively demands it—and then only on terms of just compensation.”

In setting out the five aims of the commission, and arguing the case for recognising Aboriginal land rights, it is significant that only two of these refer exclusively to justice and to the preservation of Aboriginal identity as goods in themselves apart from any other considerations, while two others refer explicitly to the good of the nation and the third implicitly does so. The two aims that explicitly address the good of the imagined Australian nation are: the promotion of social harmony and stability within the wider Australian community by removing a source of legitimate minority complaint; and the maintenance and improvement of Australia’s standing among the world of nations by showing “demonstrably fair treatment of an ethnic minority” [my emphasis]. The aim that is implicitly addressed to the good of the nation refers to the provision

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of land holdings as essential for depressed Aboriginal people who, at present, have no hope of attaining an Australian standard of living: a level of social justice for Aborigines, but at the same time serving the good of the nation by removing a national disgrace.\textsuperscript{23} The assumption of national sovereignty, and of Aboriginal land rights as a function of that sovereignty, is evident throughout the report. For example, in the section dealing with the possibility of allowing Aborigines to make claims over pastoral leases, Woodward advised against it for a number of reasons. One important reason was that it might not be in Australia’s “national interest” to allow Aborigines to claim ownership of large tracts of land which were covered by pastoral leases.\textsuperscript{24} What they might consider to be rightfully theirs, was in fact the possession of the Crown; and it was the representatives of the Crown who should decide the balance between Aboriginal aspiration and the good of the nation.

In putting forward its Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Bill in 1975 the Whitlam Government incorporated the main features of Woodward’s report, proposing to grant land on traditional as well as needs’ basis, and to protect Aborigines from mining and other encroachments. It chose to introduce legislation only where it felt it had jurisdiction, and pursued a policy of encouraging the states to introduce their own land rights legislation along similar lines. Though the Opposition had specific concerns, they supported the Bill in principle during the brief debate in the House of Representatives, and agreed with the need to grant Aboriginal land rights, particularly where spiritual links still remained. Debate on the Bill was cut short by the crisis and the sacking of the Whitlam Government in November 1975. Nevertheless, the Bill was reintroduced in a modified form and passed by the Fraser Government in 1976.\textsuperscript{25} This action indicates how far the Coalition leadership had shifted from McMahon’s


position on land rights and Aboriginal affairs of 1972. Even though it removed the provision which sought to grant Aboriginal land rights in accordance with need on non-traditional land, and watered down the most controversial aspect of the earlier bill known as the mining veto power, it retained a form of control over mining on traditional lands that the mining industry strongly opposed. The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* was passed in December 1976.

After the fall of McMahon’s Coalition Government in 1972, and especially under Malcolm Fraser’s leadership (1975-83), the ascendant forces within the Coalition broadly shifted away from assimilation to embrace integrationist and then multicultural policies in a range of strategies dealing with Aboriginal and ethnic affairs. One important indicator of this shift can be seen in the unanimous passing in the Senate, on the 20th of February 1975, of a resolution moved by the Aboriginal Liberal Senator from Queensland, Neville Bonner. The resolution called on the Government to recognize Aboriginal prior ownership of the “entire nation” and to accept that Aborigines should be compensated for dispossession.26 In the lead up to the December 1975 election the Coalition parties released a statement on their new policies on Aboriginal affairs which recognized that Aborigines had the right to

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26See *Commonwealth Parliament, Senate Debates*, February 20, 1975, p. 367. The resolution reads:

That the Senate accepts the fact that the indigenous people of Australia now known as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were in possession of this entire nation prior to the 1788 First Fleet landing at Botany Bay and urges the Australian Government to admit prior ownership by the said indigenous people then introduce legislation to compensate the people now known as Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders for dispossession of their land.

See also the discussion of the implications of the resolution in Judith Wright, *We Call For a Treaty*, p. 31. Wright points out that the Senate resolution lay dead for the rest of 1975, and remained so under the new Liberal-National Country Party Government. Scott Bennett notes that the Whitlam government made no attempt to introduce a similar motion in the House of Representatives, which led Bonner to accuse it of duplicity. See *Aborigines and Political Power*, 1989, p. 153.
“retain their racial identity and traditional lifestyle or where desired to adopt a partially or wholly European style.” They also expressed a commitment to Aboriginal land rights, Aboriginal participation in decision-making and to the development of new programmes for self-sufficiency and self-management.27 These commitments were reiterated in a published statement of the policies of the new Fraser Government after the election, which contained a classic indigenising statement:

A special obligation is also imposed upon us all to provide opportunities for Aborigines to preserve their traditions, languages and customs from further encroachment and destruction where possible.

Aboriginal values are an intrinsic part of Australia’s culture and heritage. We are part of each other. Without mutual respect and support for each other’s cultural integrity we cannot secure our personal identities and complement each other’s enterprise as we should.28

During the period of Fraser’s leadership there had always been those within the Coalition and its broader movement (especially vocal in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland)29 who disagreed with the whole idea of Aboriginal land rights, and who believed that the shift away from assimilation threatened the continuing unity of the nation, “creating” a sense of difference among Aborigines. These represented the continuing influence of assimilationist nationalism within the conservative parties, though now they had to compete with the embracing of at least some elements of indigenising nationalism by key figures within their own political movement. Moreover, their criticisms were made in the context of a new consensus at the political level

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27 As quoted and discussed in Wright, *We Call for a Treaty*, p. 33.


29 On the Northern Territory reaction see Geoff Eames, *Land Rights or A Sell Out: An Analysis of The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Bill 1976*.
that incorporated a shift away from assimilation. The difficulties for those in the Coalition who remained committed to assimilation, but who were now in the position of having to support land rights legislation adopted by their own government, can be illustrated by examining the speeches of the former Minister-in-Charge of Aboriginal Affairs Bill Wentworth.

In a general sense Wentworth adopted a strategy of containment in the face of the reality of the new consensus on land rights: at once reaffirming the older assimilationist position through the recognition of temporary traditional Aboriginal needs for protection, and limiting the land rights agenda by restricting it to “traditional” Aboriginality. The threat that land rights could grow exponentially was handled by the use of the figures of the traditional and non-traditional (or “half-caste”) Aborigine. This was exemplified in Wentworth’s parliamentary speech of November 17, 1976, dealing with the Northern Territory Land Rights Bill. Wentworth adopted a pragmatic position placing Aborigines’ rights and interests in the context of what, he believed, the majority community would accept or tolerate. Thus he argued, in defence of important amendments introduced to the old Labor Government bill, that while government should attempt to do what was best for Aborigines, and to their advantage, Aborigines would not be helped if the legislation turned the public against them:

I do not think their real advantage would be compatible with the maintenance of high tension between them and the Europeans in the Northern Territory. Anything which is in a Bill which creates and maintains that tension will not be to the ultimate advantage of the Aboriginal people.30

Their interests would not be advanced either by that which would “impede entirely the prosperity of the Northern Territory.”

But the really important feature of his argument lay in his claim that land rights were specifically for “traditional aborigines”, only “giving traditional land to traditional people”:

I think we have to remember that they are different from the aborigines most people know. Perhaps 90 per cent or 95 per

30Wentworth, CPD, HR, November 17, 1976, p. 2802.
cent of the Australian people come into contact with aborigines in Redfern or Moree or perhaps as tourists in Alice Springs. But they do not see the real, traditional Aboriginal.

The use of the term “real” for one “type” of Aborigine reveals the use of the absorption/assimilationist logic highlighted in my earlier discussions, and the fragility of Aboriginality in this discourse once it comes into contact with European culture (as per Blainey and Hasluck). The strategy of containment of the land rights challenge has its first layer exposed here: land rights are limited to those few “traditionals” who have managed to maintain their Aboriginality in the post-settlement age, and are irrelevant to the bulk of Aborigines. Moreover, even for the “traditional” Aborigines such land rights are only really a stop-gap measure, until they have become gradually assimilated to the same way of life and the same values as other Australians. Traditional Aboriginality serves the purpose of canceling out the Aboriginality of all others. While it might seem that it is thus recognised for its spirituality and difference, it is clear that even this “traditional Aboriginality” is under a negative sign, perceived in terms of time lag, as prehistoric, as anomaly in modern Australia. Even the traditional Aborigine needs to ‘catch up’, as Wentworth made clear:

What is best for these Aborigines? What is needed for them is change, but gradual change. The fault of which we have been guilty in the past is that we have put upon these traditional people pressures of change which were too vast and too urgent for them to assimilate. They have broken in the process. This is what we must avoid. Sure, we must bring change; we must help these people into a new way of life. But let the change be only as fast as they can assimilate without breaking.31

The figure of the “non-traditional” Aborigine drew on a long discursive history of denigration of the “inauthentic” Aborigine. Where Wentworth saw the traditional Aborigine as innocent and pure in motive, and in need of protection, the non-traditional Aborigine was impure, corrupting, destructive and dominating. Wentworth argued strenuously that the legislation should find ways

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31 Wentworth, CPD, HR, November 17, 1976, p. 2803.
to stop their infiltration of traditional communities with their “white ways” and their opportunism. The land rights narrative at this level fed on and reinterpreted older images of the dangerous “half-caste” while extolling the virtues of the spiritual, traditional Aborigine. Wentworth pushed for a tighter definition of Aboriginality in the Bill during debate on its reintroduction, with Senate amendments, on the 1st of December, 1976. The reasons he gave reveal his view of “non-traditional” Aborigines. He said that he didn't want someone who has 1/64 part Aboriginal ancestry to claim rights under the bill.\textsuperscript{32} Such people he presented as pernicious “carpet baggers” bent on stealing the heritage from true Aborigines. Education was a key source of such deviousness, even overstepping blood. The “European educated half blood or full blood” was a grasping figure who was ready to take everything from the guileless traditional Aborigine:

This is a Bill to protect traditional people within a European framework. They [educated Aborigines] will be able to manipulate these people, to take charge of them and, in point of fact, to take away from them their inheritance in their traditional land.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{32} Wentworth, \textit{CPD, HR} December 1, 1976, p. 3049.

\textsuperscript{33} Wentworth, \textit{CPD, HR} December 1, 1976, p. 3050. Wentworth apparently felt a deep and genuine concern for those he deemed real Aborigines, but the motivations were complex. In the first Latham Memorial Lecture, delivered by Wentworth in October 1968 in Sydney, he developed an argument for government action in the area of Aboriginal affairs. He saw three main arguments for why governments should pay attention to such a small minority. The first was that Aborigines were doing badly and common humanity called for action. The second had to do with international and especially regional perceptions—as a race distinct from others in the region it was in white Australians’ interests to be seen to be handling race problems well. The third reason was that Aborigines were a special and, in world terms, unique possession of the nation. Not only were they important as an object of academic study, “but as the key which may unlock some of the sociological mysteries which underlie the nature of all men, everywhere in the world.” They were the ultimate primitive. Because the major sociological dividing line was between nomadic and early agriculturalist man, Australian Aborigines were now unique in the world. See W.C. Wentworth, “The
This splitting of Aboriginality served ideological purposes, and provided psychological relief from guilt or blame. The responsibility for the devastation brought about by colonisation could be shifted, psychologically, from white society to these inherently “evil” figures of the white imagination; the “half-caste” could then absorb the wrath that white society might have expected to have directed at it, from a rapidly diminishing “authentic” Aboriginal community. Nagging guilt (relating to land theft) could be denied or avoided through the projection of settler greed (for land) into the “half-caste.” Safely deposited there, it could be condemned, at the same time providing relief from feelings of guilt.

Wentworth’s maneuverings indicate the unease within the Liberal-National-Country Government over the idea of land rights. This surfaced again and again in the speeches, especially from National-Country Party members trying to come to terms with something that seemed close to anathema to them.

The official position expounded by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Ian Viner represented a break with assimilationism. Even if in a reference to Wentworth’s arguments he emphasised the point that the Government, like Wentworth, wanted to maintain the “integrity” of the “traditional” Aborigine, Viner’s emphasis was different. The new position was the embracing of different strands within the liberal tradition, rather than a departure from liberalism, as Viner was careful to point out in his Second Reading Speech on the Bill, on June 3 1976. He accepted that the cultural identity of traditional Aborigines was central to their autonomy and the development of their liberty. This called for the acceptance of cultural diversity:

Most of us now appreciate more sensitively than in the past that traditional Aborigines think, feel and act about land according to a plan of life a world apart from ours... The depth of appeal that an Aboriginal’s ‘country’ has for him can be gauged by the pictures he may paint, the songs he may sing,

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the stories he may tell and the dances he may perform. His ‘country’—no matter how stricken a wilderness it may seem to others—is to him a Canaan, from which his spirit came and where he wants his bones to rest.35

Viner argued that there should be no suspicion among traditional supporters about his Government putting forward land rights legislation, as it was completely in line with its commitment to “liberal and progressive reform.” In a classic statement of an important strand of the liberal tradition he justified land rights as follows:

It is the objective of the Government to secure conditions in which all Australians can realise their own goals in life—to find fulfilment in their own way—consistent with the interests of the whole Australian community.

This relied upon a commitment to a nation that embraced cultural diversity as one of the interests of that national community:

The Australia we, as a Government, look to is one in which there is diversity and choice, because, it is in diversity that people can pursue the lives they want in ways that they determine. Securing land rights to Aborigines in the Northern Territory is a significant expression of this objective. It is an objective that will be pursued in a way consonant with the rights of other Australians.36

Kevin Cairns (Liberal Party MHR, Lilley), speaking to the Bill in November 1976, made clear that it was an attempt to deal with the “exquisite difficulty” of synchronising two very different cultures within the one territory and the one society. In an explicit break with assimilationism, he argued that there was no need to “submerge” Aboriginal culture within a broader homogeneous culture. He argued that the legislation involved the recognition of a form of Aboriginal title not based on European concepts and law, and that it was important for all Australians to accept this new set

35CPD, HR, June 3, 1976, p. 3081.
36CPD, HR, June 3, 1976, p. 3084.
of conditions. However, as one ALP MP (Les Johnson, Hughes) pointed out in reference to changes to the Whitlam Government’s bill, the Fraser Government’s response was less than a full commitment to cultural rights and self-determination. Considerable powers were taken away from the Aboriginal land councils and placed in the hands of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, and the Bill did not seek to give expression to Woodward’s more wide-ranging recommendation that land be given to fringe dwelling Aborigines on the basis not of traditional association but need.

After the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, Aboriginal affairs became less prominent in the Fraser Government’s policy priorities. Conflict with the Bjelke-Petersen state government over Aboriginal land rights in Queensland in the late 1970s, and over similar issues with Charles Court’s Liberal-Country Government in Western Australia, had a sobering effect. The Queensland Government had long embraced a strong assimilationist position, and thoroughly repudiated the concept of Aboriginal land rights. Before and after the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 they consistently opposed any Federal Government attempts to give land rights or land ownership to Queensland Aborigines, whether on reserves or in the form of pastoral leases, or to enable Aborigines on reserves to gain more autonomy for their communities.

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37 *CPD, HR*, November 17, 1976, p. 2790-1.
38 *CPD, HR*, November 17, 1976, pp. 2787-8.
39 Especially over Aurukan and Mornington Island reserves. This included the famous confrontation involving a successful High Court challenge by John Koowarta for the Aboriginal group from the Aurukun Reserve. The Commonwealth government had bought, through its Aboriginal Land Fund Commission, a small lease at Archer River for the group on their traditional lands in North Queensland (Cape York), but transfer of the lease was refused by the Bjelke-Petersen government, under a clause in the legislation that allowed such a refusal without explanation. See C.D. Rowley, *Recovery*, pp. 15-16, 95. The successful High Court challenge was not the end of the matter, as the Bjelke-Petersen Government managed to thwart the Koowarta group by declaring the area a national park. For a discussion of the battle to give the Aboriginal Councils control of their affairs and to remove discriminatory restrictions upon them, at Aurukun and Mornington Island, see *Recovery*. 188
justification for such opposition was frequently racist, with the Queensland Government arguing that Aborigines and their communities had shown themselves incapable of developing lands economically. Such land grants and related policies aimed at Aboriginal communal autonomy, it was argued, would be tantamount to the setting up of a separate black state in Queensland with serious implications for all Australians.40 The Fraser Government’s new-federalism, with its strong commitment to states’ rights, meant that it was loathe to be seen as in public conflict with the Queensland Government over Aboriginal affairs. Senator Fred Chaney, who in December 1978 replaced Viner as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, signaled in discussions with the Queensland Government and with Queensland Aboriginal communities that the “ideology” of land rights was divisive and overstated, a “slogan” that got in the way of a more pragmatic approach to the practical problems of Aboriginal communities; a view that sat favourably with the Queensland Government.41 The Court Government expressed its disapproval of the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, and came into conflict with the Fraser Government over the buying up of pastoral leases for Aborigines in Western Australia, leading in the late 1970s to the Federal Government backing away from supporting any but already

pp. 95-7. For a more recent and more detailed account of this whole period in Queensland, relying on archival material, see Rosalind Kidd, The Way We Civilise, 1997, ch. 8. See also Lyndall Ryan, “Aborigines and Islanders”, 1989, p. 396, and “Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders”, 1985.

40See the Ministerial statement on “Archer River Pastoral Holding; Aboriginal Land Fund Commission”, Queensland Parliamentary Debates, December 8, 1976, pp. 2208-9. A 1972 Cabinet policy decision stated:

The Queensland Government does not view favourably proposals to acquire large areas of additional freehold or leasehold land for development by Aborigines or aboriginal groups in isolation.


existing Aboriginal pastoral leases.\textsuperscript{42} During the Noonkanbah incident where, between 1978 and 1980, the Western Australian Government pushed through mining exploration in the face of Aboriginal, trade Union, church and other public opposition, the Federal Government refused to intervene, despite the international embarrassment and the fact that they had bought up the property for the traditional Yungngora owners as a way of recognising traditional ties to land. The Fraser Government allowed the forcible removal of Aborigines and other protesters from a sacred area around the drilling site at Noonkanbah by the Western Australian Government when mining was to begin.\textsuperscript{43}

The opposition within the Federal Coalition's own political movement and constituency, centered around the notion that economic development and especially mining exploration was being retarded by Aboriginal land rights, led to an increasing tendency to retreat from the political implications of the form of liberalism articulated by figures like Viner. Between 1979 and 1983 the Coalition Government had no stated policy on Aboriginal land rights.\textsuperscript{44} They maintained a party platform position on Aboriginal affairs, but this represented a weakening of the early Fraser Government position on land rights examined above. The 1982 platform included the following commitment on land rights:

\textsuperscript{42}See Margaret Ann Franklin, "Racism Australian Style", 1979, pp. 104-7.
\textsuperscript{43}See Stephen Hawke and Michael Gallagher, \textit{Noonkanbah: Whose Land Whose Law}, 1989, pp. 99-100, chs 17, 18 and passim. In August 1980 The Western Australian Government ordered the movement of the drilling equipment to the site when unions, through the ACTU and TLC, ordered that it was not to be transported and threatened to block roads if the attempt was made to transport it there. The events received wide media coverage, and reached an international audience. Malcolm Fraser was faced by angry Native American protesters on a visit to America during the Noonkanbah crisis. See J.P. Nieuwenhusen, "Aboriginal Land Rights and Industry", pp. 12-13; Judith Wright \textit{We Call for a Treaty}, pp. 132-40.
The provision of areas of land under Aboriginal ownership or
administration where aboriginals can live their traditional way
of life, with special emphasis on lands for which there is a
proven traditional Aboriginal attachment.

The emphasis of the platform, while continuing to recognise the
importance of distinct Aboriginal culture for Australia's national
culture, was on individual advancement of Aborigines. 45

Concluding Remarks

Through its different historical phases from the late 1960s to the
present—which I have begun to examine in this chapter and will
pursue in the next two chapters—opposition and support for
indigenous land and other rights have involved protagonists in
different strategies to contain the dilemmas raised by Aboriginal
calls for recognition of their distinct political status vis-a-vis the
Australian nation-state. In many instances this has meant
containing, codifying, or even nullifying Aboriginality. Aboriginal
land rights have been argued for by settler Australians in two
major ways, sometimes in a manner combining both, at other times
highlighting one and excluding the other. First there is the argument
that Aborigines need land in order to build up for themselves a
secure economic base that will launch them more equally into the
broader Australian society. The historian C. D. Rowley provided a
comprehensive version of this argument for Aboriginal land rights
in his three volume history of Aboriginal/settler relations. This is
not to say that he did not, at the same time and more forcefully
elsewhere, argue from a perspective emphasising historical justice
and rights, and the need to recognise spiritual connection with
land. 46 The latter concerns together form the basis of the second
argument. The argument can be made in strong terms if one accepts
that Aboriginal cultural survival is only possible if Aborigines can

45See Liberal Party Platform, pp. 24-5, in David Combe, Greg Hartung and
Geoffrey Hawker (eds.), Platforms For Government: The national platforms
and policies of Australia's political parties analysed and compared, 1982.
46See C.D. Rowley's trilogy, The Destruction of Aboriginal Society, Outcasts in
White Australia, and The Remote Aborigines. See also later works such as A
Matter of Justice and Recovery.
exercise their land rights. This also contains a strong justice component. Giving back land to Aborigines who have been unlawfully dispossessed is seen as a form of historical justice. The exclusion of the “needs” and “compensation for dispossession” bases for granting land to Aborigines from the Fraser Government’s Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 illustrated the way that the threat of more extensive land claims could be contained by emphasising spiritual connection and cultural need as sources for cultural and individual enhancement, making use of the category of the traditional Aborigine, while not recognising the other forms of claim.

There remain considerable divisions within the parties over the question and meaning of land rights, as I will show in the next two chapters. These became particularly evident as land rights shifted to the national stage to include lands within the states. This shift involved a recognition of an Aboriginality, linked to land claims, that was much broader than the “spiritual” “traditional” Aboriginality recognised and celebrated, as I have shown, by leaders like Wentworth. This broader category of Aboriginality was much more threatening for assimilationist settler-nationalism. The land rights debate at the national level is further complicated by the federal relations enshrined in the constitution. The complexity of the shifting position of various political factions on land rights is a function of the relative persuasion of different forms of settler-nationalism (broadly, the two modes I have termed assimilationist and indigenising), political expedience, electoral position, party politics, economic conditions or the perception thereof, and the balance of forces between all of these.

In this chapter I examine the effort of the Hawke Labor Government to extend the Aboriginal land rights agenda nationally during the period 1983 to 1986. The Hawke Government faced widespread resistance to this move, and eventually retreated. My analysis focuses upon the impact of settler-nationalist discourses within the politics of Aboriginal land rights. The failure of the national Aboriginal land rights initiative represented the failure of indigenising settler-nationalism to entrench itself as the central nationalist ideology of a broad cross-section of the Australian public. Though indigenising settler-nationalism was adhered to within the leadership of the Hawke Government, the period saw a return to assimilationist settler-nationalism among the Coalition leadership as it regrouped after the electoral defeat of 1983. The Hawke Government faced resistance from within its own ranks, and from powerful conservative forces outside parliament, as it attempted to institutionalize indigenising principles.

The National Aboriginal Land Rights Initiative

Before its election to Government in 1983 the ALP had pledged itself to a package of reforms in Aboriginal affairs, including: efforts to improve relations between indigenous and non-indigenous communities; policies that would result in improved general life outcomes for the indigenous; and the implementation of national land rights legislation in its first term, taking as its model the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976.¹ These strong commitments reflected the perception that the states were dragging their feet in the face of continuing Aboriginal demands for justice. Though South Australia had introduced land rights legislation—the Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act of 1981, passed by a conservative

government—and other states had legislation under consideration, the ALP, groups of concerned non-Aborigines, and many Aboriginal communities and leaders believed that the land rights and Aboriginal autonomy agendas had stalled. Significantly, Western Australia and Queensland, with large Aboriginal populations, had failed to implement land rights legislation; the conservative governments in these states in the 1970s and early 1980s had actively opposed federal government efforts to increase Aboriginal land holdings, to enhance the autonomy of Aboriginal communities and, in Queensland, efforts to dismantle discriminatory policies and actions. There had been heated public debate, and even scandal, over the Fraser Government’s handling of the Uranium Ranger mine in the Northern Territory, during which it had gained what some perceived to be a coerced agreement from the Northern Land Council to mine on traditional land. During the Noonkanbah crisis the Fraser Government had displayed its reluctance to protect Aboriginal rights against the agenda of the Western Australian Government. Gray’s Liberal government in Tasmania, elected in April 1982, scrapped the land rights bill drafted in 1981 by the previous Labor government, repudiating the claim that any Aborigines had land rights in Tasmania. Within the ALP and, more broadly, among supporters of indigenous rights, it was argued that the public will for reparation towards Aborigines, as exemplified by the result of the 1967 Referendum, was not being expressed through parliamentary action.

Soon after the March 1983 election victory the new Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Clyde Holding set up a steering committee of Aboriginal representatives and lawyers to advise on land rights. On the 15th of November 1983, after a period of discussion with Aboriginal, pastoral, business, mining and community groups, Holding introduced five principles which would guide the Hawke Government in its national approach to Aboriginal land rights: 1) Aboriginal land would be held under inalienable freehold title; 2) protection of Aboriginal sites of cultural and spiritual significance;

3) Aboriginal control in relation to mining on Aboriginal land; 4) access for Aborigines to mining royalty equivalents; and 5) that compensation for lost land would be negotiated.

The ALP’s national land rights model was articulated from within an explicit and elaborate framework of indigenising settler-nationalism. This framework was used persistently by Holding and other advocates in the attempt to draw the public and the Opposition parties behind the Government’s policy. On the 8th of December 1983 Holding moved that the House acknowledge a resolution, setting out prior ownership of Australia by Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, recognizing that Aboriginal rights had been historically ignored, and that this had led to the current poor status of Aboriginal people. This wide-ranging and audacious resolution called for special measures including a strong policy of self-determination for the indigenous, extensive land rights, protection of sacred sites and cultural identity, restoring the rights of Aboriginal families to raise their children, and the recognition of Aboriginal customary law. The Government would at the same time accelerate programmes aimed at improving indigenous living standards, and actively promote improved relations between indigenous and non-indigenous communities.

Holding’s lengthy speech supporting the wording of the resolution called for a final reconciliation between colonising and colonised to form a renewed nation. He argued that Aboriginal culture was “the oldest culture known to mankind” and that, in Australia, “at a time when our European forebears still lived in caves, art and dance, song and ceremony, language and religion, had become an integral of this great ancient culture.” This culture, that settler Australia had for so long disdained and attempted to destroy, could “now enrich and enhance all our lives.” He extolled the virtues of ancient and contemporary Aboriginal art, claiming that the latter was “undoubtedly the most distinctively Australian cultural item that is produced by modern Australians.” Aboriginal art, dance, song and language contained “great lessons” and “immensely subtle experiences of people at harmony with nature.” This was, he argued, “our national heritage and the hallmark of Australian culture”; we were “all the richer for its preservation.”

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5CPD, HR, December 8, 1983, pp. 3488-89.
The opposition, by mining and other business interests, to certain of the five principles of the proposed national land rights legislation was expected; the Australian Mining Industry Council (AMIC), for example, had argued against the control over mining aspects of land rights since the 1970s. The experiences of the Whitlam and Fraser governments made opposition from some states to any federal initiative to introduce land rights predictable. Less predictable, however, was the character of the federal Coalition’s heated opposition to these and other related policy initiatives, such as the legislation to protect sacred sites, and the handing back of Ayers Rock (retitled by the Aboriginal name Uluru) to traditional owners. Fundamentally, this revealed the collapse of the bipartisanship in Aboriginal affairs at the political level, that had operated under the Whitlam and Fraser Governments. During that period of consensus the three major parties, despite internal conflict and division, had acted in concert to institutionalise key indigenising principles, in the form of legislation such as the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, and in the setting up of programmes that recognised Aboriginal aspirations for cultural and political autonomy.

This collapse of bipartisanship had important implications for the tenor of public debate on Aboriginal issues, and contributed to the failure of the Hawke Government to implement its national land rights policy. It represented, not simply an intellectual, but a significant emotional shift in the political climate. An important feature of leadership is its capacity to sculpt public emotion, as A.F. Davies once tellingly put it. Major political movements rely for coherence and solidarity as much (perhaps even more) on their emotional structure as upon the ideas they represent. But emotional structures are not static. They shift and change in accord with political pressures, crises and so on. Political leaders ride the

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public mood, but they also contribute to its character. They direct projected feelings from the groups they represent onto other individuals and groups, focusing blame, for example, for economic, ideological or political crises upon well-targeted outgroups. The period of bipartisanship at the political level prior to the 1980s meant that, notwithstanding the building of relatively inarticulate resentment in the populace in response to Governmental actions, major public policy shifts and new programmes for Aboriginal communities could be carried through in a non-controversial way. Opposition from major industry and farming groups certainly have (and had) their effect, but when leadership of significant political movements begin to articulate anger and resentment over policy, and to spread doubt about the security of the economy or nation, this presents immense difficulties for its Government advocates and implementers. The apparent lack of specific self-interest of political leaders—i.e. in serving the public or national interest—means that their articulations of anger, resentment, fear or doubt have a moral legitimacy, a sense of measured objectivity, where the warnings, claims and arguments of the representatives of other groups might be perceived as stemming from narrow self-interest. Political leaders—despite the evidence sometimes produced of the low regard with which they are held in the public eye—wield a great deal of moral authority and, importantly, have high visibility through the parliaments and the media.

The Coalition Return to Assimilationist Settler-Nationalism

Wilfred Bion in his famous studies of group dynamics referred to three “basic assumptions” that formed the unconscious emotional basis of the actions and beliefs of a group at any one time. These he called “dependency”, “pairing” and “fight/flight”. He distinguished this feature of groups from what he termed the “work group” functions—the more conscious, problem-solving and rational actions of the group, the tasks it set for itself. He came to describe these as basic assumptions because, through his involvement in groups, he saw that emotions and expectations (for example of what leaders could and should do for the group) tended to form into

distinguishable clusters, and that emotions like anxiety or anger gained different inflections depending upon which was the prevailing basic assumption. In “dependency” the group behaved as if it had “met in order to be sustained by a leader on whom it depends for nourishment, material and spiritual, and protection.” In “pairing” the group seemed to be observing a pair of its members who were in the process of creating something new and exciting for the group. A “peculiar air of hopefulness and expectation” pervaded the group. One of the typical expressions the pairing group gave rise to was the hopeful expectation that “the coming season, spring, summer, autumn or winter, as the case may be, will be more agreeable; that some new kind of community—an improved group—should be developed, and so on.” This belief could become “messianic”—feelings of omnipotent mastery of situations could, for a time, prevail. The feeling of hope was dominating, indeed the driving force in the group—at “the opposite pole to feelings of hatred, destructiveness, and despair.” The latter group of emotions could be held at bay only for as long as hope prevailed—i.e., was never realised in any concrete form, as a leader, a messiah, a solution. The name for the third basic assumption almost explains itself—the group is met to either fight or to take flight from something. Hatred, destructiveness and fear are the primary emotions. Preservation of the group at any cost provides the primary motivation for its members. Any perceived threat to that survival will engender a response of fight or flight. Groups moved between the three basic assumptions, sometimes in response to outside pressures.8

In Political Ensembles Graham Little made use of Bion’s basic assumption groups to explore the nature of different political climates that could be perceived as discrete periods internationally and through changing governments in Australia. He introduced his own terms for politico-social groupings—Structure, Group and Ensemble—which built on and coincided with, respectively, Bion’s fight/flight, dependency and pairing basic assumption groups. In

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8 Wilfred Bion, *Experiences in Groups and other papers*, 1961. See especially the paper “Group dynamics”, pp. 141-91, where the “work group” is discussed (pp. 143-46), and the “basic assumptions” introduced and discussed (pp. 146-53), and passim. Quotes at pp. 147, 150, 151, respectively.
Little’s explanation, the Hawke Government represented the Ensemble (pairing group), which overtook both Fraser’s Structure (fight/flight) and the Hayden led ALP’s Group (dependency). A sense of hope was the prevailing mood engendered by the Hawke ascendancy. Hawke’s “love affair” with the Australian public and his creative solutions replaced Fraser’s defensive strong leadership; he accommodated, rather than was dominated by, Hayden’s group concerns of everybody pitching in together and looking after one another.  

Bion’s and Little’s analyses of the emotional currents flowing through and directing group life and (for the latter) political action and climate, together with my concepts of assimilationist and indigenising settler-nationalisms, provide useful tools for understanding the emotional shifts involved in the ascendency of Hawke’s Labor, and in the altered ideological positioning of the Coalition, especially in its response to Aboriginal affairs, after the 1983 election loss. As I showed in the last chapter, the Fraser Government experimented with, and to some extent embraced, the Aboriginal policy that had been mapped out and begun by the Whitlam Government. This was in some respects at odds with the general tenor of the Fraser Government in other areas of policy, if not in fact then at least at the level of its political rhetoric: i.e., especially in economics, the limiting of the role of government, the reduction of welfare in the service of building stronger Australian individuals, and the concern with upholding traditional Australian structures and values.

The shift in the federal Coalition position was a complex response to: the perceived failure of the Fraser years in government; the neo-conservatism that emerged as an international phenomenon in the late 1970s; the transformation of the Labor Party into a successful political force that attracted part of the Coalition’s traditional constituency; and to the ALP’s national land rights agenda. The perception, within the Liberal Party, that it had been drifting ideologically found resolution in a renewed nationalism that became increasingly assimilationist in tone. This perceived need for a tidying up at the ideological edges, and in the

9Graham Little, Political Ensembles, passim. For political climates internationally see ch. 8, and for Australia see ch. 9.
eyes of some, at the very centre, was a flight/flight phenomenon *par excellence*. Neo-conservatism—with its purified libertarian economics, overwhelming faith in the free market, embracing of negative as opposed to positive liberty, and emphasis on the individual over the group—found a response within the Liberal Party.\(^\text{10}\) Some conservatives, inside and outside the Liberal and National parties, believed that Australia was imperiled economically and socially by government restrictions of various kinds. Conservative parties, it was argued, had fallen into the trap of “pandering” to sectional interests, when they should have been concerned with the “more legitimate” interests of mainstream Australian society; these sectional interests were typically characterised as the social welfare, ethnic and feminist “lobby groups”, as well as Aborigines. This was part of a general critique of the Labor Party’s corporatism, towards which, it was argued, the Fraser Government had tended.\(^\text{11}\) Conservative parties’ ideologies were increasingly framed by the commitment to govern “for all Australians” rather than for “special interest groups.” This was signaled clearly in the Liberal Party’s own “Valder report” of late 1983, responding comprehensively to the defeat of the Fraser Government and calling for a reorganisation of the party philosophically, in terms of policy, and organisationally. The Valder report called for the strengthening of national community (not to be confused with Little’s notion of the Group, emphasising, rather, traditional Australian values, and above all economic development and individual liberty); the message was that certain political actions were weakening the nation. The commitment of the Liberal Party, the report indicated, would be to the nation as a whole, while recognising individual diversity and cultural differences as these were expressed individually.\(^\text{12}\)


\(^{11}\) On the Hawke Government’s corporatism see Paul Boreham “Corporatism”, 1990.

\(^{12}\) See John Valder (Chairman), *Facing the facts: Report of the Liberal Party Committee of Review*, 1983. The Report sought to explicitly respond to the perceived failure of the Fraser Government to live up to its rhetoric (pp. 115-
These ideological changes had a direct impact on land rights and other policy positions in Aboriginal affairs. After the fall of the Fraser Government in 1983 the Liberal Party underwent a broad shift from the affirmative position on land rights, written into the party platform as late as 1983,\textsuperscript{13} to an ambivalent and increasingly negative position. The Opposition argued, for example, that the experience of their own land rights legislation in the Northern Territory, in the years following its enactment, had convinced them that the veto on mining had been an error that was causing the hold-up of the Northern Territory’s, and Australia’s, economic development.\textsuperscript{14} This was a significant step back from the land rights model previously accepted by the Coalition Government. Woodward had argued that land rights without Aboriginal control over mining was meaningless, a position the Coalition endorsed in 1976. In the 1980s, land rights were seen by many in the conservative parties, and in the conservative press, as another example of those dangerous restrictions on economic activity and on the liberty of individuals in their pursuit of economic gain. It was argued that Australia would miss out on the minerals boom, and thus the path to future prosperity (that all Australians should have a share in), because the regulation entailed in land rights brought into the

\textsuperscript{6} On renewed national community and the focus on the public interest rather than special interests, see pp. 52-4. Note, however, that the report sends mixed messages on the latter, as Patrick O’Brien points out in \textit{The Liberals}, 1985, ch. 7.

\textsuperscript{13} See for example \textit{Liberal Party of Australia, 1983 Policy on Aboriginal Affairs}, which stated that the Federal government should implement land rights policy after consultation with the states, as cited in Libby, \textit{Hawke’s Law}, 1989, p. 98.

\textsuperscript{14} Ian Cameron (NP, Maranoa, Qld), interjecting during a speech by Clyde Holding, said that the \textit{Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976} “will go down in history as the worst thing we ever did.” See \textit{CPD, HR}, October 8, 1985, p. 1615. In a speech just prior to his interjection, Cameron claimed that members of the Coalition “stand for equal rights for all Australians and not for specific groups of people being treated any differently from others”. He referred to land rights in the Northern Territory as “apartheid in reverse”, and claimed that the Northern Territory was being “persecuted” by the Commonwealth Government over land rights, pp. 1610-11.
equation the (presumed) negative Aboriginal response to exploration and mining. Some argued that what Aborigines needed was less regulation and fewer handouts, so that they would become more disciplined and self-reliant. The mainstream conservative journal Quadrant published an article in early 1984 in which it was claimed that Aboriginal poverty and the associated social malaise, especially on the Aboriginal outstations, was primarily the result of Government welfare and self-determination policies from the 1970s. Echoing the earlier hopes of some Government officials in the 1930s that the indigenous would fade away as a population problem, the article referred to the disastrous “unrestrained breeding” of Aborigines, brought about by the “powerful incentive” of obtaining Family Allowance payments and single mother’s pensions. Governments, through their actions, had “created” a minority with international associations, where once there had been “an old slack, always-with-us ‘Aboriginal problem’ which was gradually, albeit too slowly, eroding itself away and which, in any case, represented numerically, less than a quarter of one percent of our total population”.

John Stone, who had recently resigned from his position as Secretary to the Treasury and who later became a prominent conservative federal politician, argued in another Quadrant article, in December 1984, that “social justice issues” impinged upon the efficient functioning of the Australian economy. He highlighted the example of the “growing shambles in the area of the so-called Aboriginal land ‘rights policy.’” Aboriginal policy since the 1967 referendum had been disastrous, with “a backlash of major—and growing—proportions”, stimulated by these policies and the actions of the “bureaucratic and political zealots” framing and

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16See Ted Zakrovske (“a nom de plume of an Australian writer who has spent a lot of time recently among Aboriginal people”), “Australia’s Third World”, 1984. For the unrestrained breeding comments see pp. 38, 39, 40. Longer quote from p. 38.
implementing them. The unity of Australia, he argued, was gravely threatened. The notion of making restitution he saw as an “utter nonsense!” Sacred sites was a “singularly dubious concept“, and it along with land rights were leading us into a “dangerous morass” of uncertainty.\textsuperscript{17} This combative language was to become a characteristic feature of conservative responses to Aboriginal issues.

Within such discourse one can perceive a confluence of interests and agendas of individuals and groups occupying different positions in the socioeconomic structure. Conservative opinion-makers and leaders were actively directing the more diffuse resentment and anger of the populace, in a climate of economic uncertainty (especially in the aftermath of the economic recession from 1982), onto the indigenous for their supposed holding up of the development of the country. The claim was that a few Aborigines who had managed to secure land rights were becoming rich at the expense of everyone else. Those Aborigines who had “billions of dollars” spent on them through various government programmes were “wasting”, through their own irresponsibility, laziness, and inability to cope with civilization (without the aid of paternalistic policies), money that other Australians could use to improve their collective and individual situation. This sort of unrestrained scapegoating served major economic interests, such as those centered around mining, that stood to gain increased profits through fewer institutional controls. For the broader population, especially those most directly affected by continuing high levels of unemployment, a ready target for blame for myriad and more diffuse difficulties, resentments, anger, fears, and envious feelings, was made available and given public sanction. The positive direction given by leaders and opinion makers to those diffuse feelings, gave psychological release from confusion through the “explanation” and simplification of a complex socio-economic reality.

This hardening of position, and redirection of reparative feelings away from the indigenous, was well represented by conservatives at the political level. Members of the National Party tended to take

a strong assimilationist line, positioning themselves against Aboriginal land rights in principle because, they argued, these represented a form of “separate treatment” and “segregation” according to “race”. In Victoria the Liberal leader Jeff Kennett pledged that his party would not accept land rights legislation in any form, a position endorsed by the Victorian Nationals. Throughout 1985-86 he and the State Opposition virulently opposed the Cain Labor Government’s efforts to introduce land rights, touring the rural areas to campaign for their oppositional stance, and blocking the land rights bill in the Legislative Council. This coincided with extensive campaigning against land rights by the right-wing racist organisation the League of Rights which, according to one commentator, was flourishing in Victoria because of a rural backlash it had helped to ferment against state and potential national land rights legislation. In July 1984 the Liberal leader of the NSW Opposition Nick Greiner said on a television program: “We do not believe in New South Wales that there is a legitimate case for Aboriginal land rights.” The Northern Territory National/Country-Liberal government wanted to repeal key sections of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, and to gain control of it

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19 See Lyndall Ryan, “Aborigines and Islanders”, 1989, pp. 397-8; Scott Bennett, Aborigines and Political Power, p. 31.


by removing it from federal jurisdiction. Outraged by what they saw as the Commonwealth's lack of consultation and interference in Territory affairs, they called an election as an immediate response to the Hawke Government's announcement, in late 1983, that it would hand back Ayers Rock, and won with a 12% percent swing in their favour. Prominent Western Australian Liberal leaders such as William Hassell argued that the Coalition's passing of the land rights act in 1976 was an aberration, and completely contradictory to liberal principles. Hassell toured other states and received national media coverage for his views on "land rights as racism". Key figures in the Queensland Government, including Bjelke-Petersen, were similarly vocal, as were representatives of prominent mining interests like Hugh Morgan who spelt out, in controversial and alarmist lectures and speeches in 1984, a


\[23\] See Hassell's comments in *Western Australian Parliamentary Debates, House of Assembly*, Volume 250, New Series, October 10, 1984, pp. 2209-10, and the long debate on this day where he and other Coalition members spelled out in detail their disapproval of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory)* Act 1976, and the WA Coalition's complete opposition to any concept of Aboriginal land rights, pp. 2190-2240. Hassell made notable use of the "full-blood/half-caste" distinction to full political effect in denying the legitimacy of Aboriginal land rights aspirants, including the then leader of the National Aboriginal Conference, Robert Riley (see p. 2212). Libby, in *Hawke's Law*, points out that the WA Liberals had been long opposed to land rights, speaking out against them in 1976, despite two WA federal Liberal Ministers (Ian Viner and Senator Fred Chaney) being instrumental in implementing the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory)* Act 1976 (p. 98). In opposition the WA Liberal Party was explicitly against land rights. The position hardened against land rights under the leadership of the conservative William Hassell, once it became an important electoral issue; the WA Liberals campaigned heavily on it at state by-elections in 1984, and the state election of 1986 (p. 85). When Burke introduced his Aboriginal Land Bill, that had been written by a drafting committee which included the major mining, business and pastoral industry representatives, and accommodated most of the mining industry's concerns, the Bill was blocked in the Council by the Liberal and National-Country parties, in April 1985 (p. 97).
coherent rightwing anti-land rights ideology. The formation or revival of a series of right-wing think-tanks in the 1980s (several of which Hugh Morgan had an important financial and intellectual involvement in) had a leading influence on public debate, not only in economics and industrial relations, but in Aboriginal affairs including land rights.

Such principled opposition to land rights from key conservative organisations and figures received national attention at a time when the federal Coalition parties, and the leader of the Opposition Andrew Peacock—no doubt feeling the pressure from the more rigid stance of their state and Territory counterparts—opposed any national land rights legislation, and gave mixed messages about the very concept of land rights. Despite Coalition claims, at times, that they had not stepped back from their earlier position on Aboriginal affairs, many indigenous people, including the former Fraser Government and Queensland Liberal senator Neville Bonner, believed that they had. From early 1984 statements from key Coalition spokesmen on Aboriginal affairs indicated a shift from the concept of Aboriginal land rights—inalienable freehold title—to the notion of granting Aborigines a form of secure title no different to

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24 See especially the speech he gave at the annual AMIC seminar of 1984, titled “Religious Traditions, Mining and Land Rights”, in Ken Baker, The land rights debate, 1985. pp. 22-6. He argued that Christianity wholeheartedly endorsed the activities of miners, and that for a “Christian Aborigine, land rights or the proposed Heritage Protection Act [for sacred areas] is a symbolic step back into the world of paganism, superstition, fear, and darkness”, p. 23. He thus presented his anti-land rights campaign as a Christian crusade.

25 The Institute for Public Affairs (IPA) in its Victorian and New South Wales versions; the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) in Sydney; the Australian Institute for Public Policy (AIPP) in Perth; and the H.R. Nicholls Society in Melbourne. Hugh Morgan was associated with the CIS, the IPA in Melbourne, and the AIPP, which Paul Kelly claims were the three most important right-wing think tanks in the early 1980s. See The End of Certainty, p. 46, and the fuller discussion of these developments, including the transformation of the Coalition’s dominant ideology, pp. 34-53.

26 As reported in The Sydney Morning Herald, July 31, 1984, and other newspapers at the time.
that of other Australians, thus undermining special indigenous claims.\textsuperscript{27}

Moreover, members of the Federal Coalition made public statements raising fears that houses, private farms and other private property were under threat from the Hawke Government’s proposed land rights regime. Peacock, as one member of the Hawke Government pointed out in parliament, was distancing himself from the existence of a Liberal or Coalition policy on land rights. He had made a public statement in August 1984 to the effect that his affinity with his Victorian hobby farm was equal to the spiritual connection Aborigines felt to their land. “I have it with my farm in Victoria,” he said; “it’s wrong to believe that any one section of Australia has a special affinity with the land.”\textsuperscript{28} In the face of outrage from Aboriginal groups, sections of the media, prominent non-Aborigines and some Liberal party figures, Peacock was forced into an embarrassing retraction. That the leader could make such a comment, however, suggested an important shift in ideology. Peacock was indicating that Aboriginal land rights challenged his sense of Australian identity, and that of every other settler Australian. The recognition of special spiritual attachment to land, seen by Liberals in the mid-1970s as essential for the cultural integrity and well-being of the “traditional Aborigine”, was now being undermined. Before the 1984 election the Liberal Party came out with a statement in support of the principle of land rights—despite those within the party and the Coalition partners who opposed any concept of land rights—but opposed to federal imposition of land rights on the states. It was best to leave it to the states to develop their own land rights initiatives, in accordance with their own state land laws and with the specific needs of their own indigenous peoples. This was largely a negative response, embracing a position which warned of the dangers to Australia of pursuing land rights any further. Leaving land rights to the states allowed the Coalition to maintain an apparent openness to land

\textsuperscript{27}See statements to this effect made by Shadow Minister Porter, \textit{CPD, HR}, March 5, 1984, p. 452.

rights at the federal level, while signaling to the state Coalition parties that they would not oppose their more rigid anti-land rights positions. Moreover, they stated that they would remove the right of Aborigines to negotiate over mining in the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* 1976, and repeal any uniform legislation imposed by the Hawke Government.²⁹ In Peacock’s election policy speech of November 15 1984, he raised the spectre of land being taken under the Labor government’s proposed national land rights legislation:

> Liberal land rights policy does not include overturning existing titles and resuming farming land or private property; isolating vast areas from exploration and development; or the Commonwealth Government assuming state responsibilities.

Notably, the Peacock policy statement said nothing about what the Coalition actually supported in the area of land rights.³⁰

Instead of drawing upon reparative tendencies within both the Coalition parties and the public, the Opposition shifted the emphasis to fear, obstructing each initiative of the Hawke Government as if it were defending the Australian nation from attack. The reality of being part of the opposition in an adversarial parliamentary system no doubt contributed to this positioning, but the forces of anger were also determined by the perception of earlier failures in government and by the development of harder, more combative new right agendas, the latter laced, at times, with a paranoid fervour. The Coalition entered, and at the same time helped to create, a political space in which reparation was perceived as weakness, and even danger. The good object of the nation needed to be protected from a range of enemies including the Labor Party, left wing and “soft” liberal intellectuals, and an “Aboriginal industry” intent on aggrandizing itself and promoting its own material gain

²⁹See the policy as outlined by Phillip Ruddock, in *CPD, HR*, September 5, 1984, pp. 648-9; see also the reports on this policy in *The Age, The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian*, August 31, 1984. The policy was released on August 30, 1984.

while failing to represent the interests of “true Aborigines.” This “good nation” became increasingly idealised, a part object in Kleinian terms, as a result of splitting.

Some Liberal Party politicians remained committed to a more flexible, bipartisan approach to Aboriginal questions, but their views became less politically important as the Coalition shifted ground. Throughout the period of the doomed national land rights initiative, the Coalition’s key strategy was to drive a wedge between the question of land rights and what it deemed to be the “real” needs of Aborigines in the areas of health, housing, education and employment. While the chief Coalition spokesmen on Aboriginal affairs (Roger Shipton, James Porter and David Connolly) usually denied that they were opposed to land rights as such, the repeated reference to the “real” needs of the indigenous indicated that, in the Coalition’s view, land rights were less important, less central to Aboriginal aspirations—a claim that indigenous leaders and communities continued to vehemently deny.\textsuperscript{31} In September 1985 Shipton implied that the Coalition could see very little value in any form of land rights. Not only did he argue that the proposed uniform land rights legislation needed to be abandoned, but in a wide-ranging critique calling for a complete reassessment of all aspects of government and departmental handling of Aboriginal affairs, he argued that land rights and the movement behind it had become a destructive force in Australian society:

As to land rights generally, I believe that the land rights movement may have given some Aboriginals a sense of identity but on balance it has divided the nation. Many Aboriginal people do not identify with the movement. The land rights movement certainly is not supported by the vast majority of Australians. . . Land rights, especially uniform land rights, have created divisiveness in Australian society and set back the cause of real advancement in areas of need for Aboriginal

\textsuperscript{31}See Shipton’s criticism of Holding’s “obsessions with land rights” which, he claimed, diverted his attention from Aborigines’ real needs, \textit{CPD, HR}, 1985, May 13, 1985, p. 2161.
Australians. On balance the land rights movement has done more harm than good for the Aboriginal people.32

The continued attack on Holding's "racially divisive" actions gave a message to the public that the Coalition would reverse the trend towards "separatism." In October 1985, speaking to the Government's Appropriation Bill (no. 1), David Connolly pointed to the "absolutely enormous amount of money" spent on Aboriginal assistance since the 1967 Referendum, and signaled that the Coalition had recognised the need to rethink and to change the approach:

On the wider picture there is a very real risk that, if we are to proceed as we have for the last 17 years, simply directing funding at a general range of programs which have not changed very much over that period, we run a major risk of creating, if we have not already created, in the minds of a significant number of Australians who are not Aboriginal the perception of a state within a state; or if I may use a term which I do not mean to be used in any other sense, a form of administrative apartheid, a tendency to try to create a bureaucratic system which covers every facet of the perceived needs of a specific section of the Australian population. We have done this to a very large degree. In fact, it could even be argued that the very establishment of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs ensured that that attitude of mind would progress.33

The Coalition found in Aboriginal land rights, and Aboriginal policy in general, a potent focus for opposition to a Labor government which, despite a strong commitment spelt out in its party platform,34 was factionally divided over how to pursue national land rights legislation. The Burke Labor government in Western Australia opposed the federal government position after the release of Holding's five principles. Aboriginal leaders, in response to attempts by the Hawke leadership to reach a compromise with Burke's, mining companies', and pastoralists'
concerns, voiced their opposition to any shift from the five principles. These struggles and debates led to a long drawn out and politically damaging struggle within the ALP, and provided a focus for opposition. This was especially important for the Coalition, given that the Hawke Government had embraced positions on economic policy that made them, in this respect, less distinguishable from the conservative parties than they had been in the past. As part of a general move away from the socialist platform the ALP had been at least philosophically committed to, this included the shift away from a philosophy of state ownership of major enterprises (the “nationalization” of key industries). The ALP had, in part as a result of this shift, considerably broadened its political base, a fact that the Liberal and National parties clearly emphasised in their responses to the 1983 electoral defeat.35

The public controversy over land rights, and evidence of public concern about the way things were heading in the area of Aboriginal affairs, together with (and fanned by) important anti-land rights campaigns by mining companies and other business interests, opened one avenue for the Coalition parties to rebuild their constituency. The language of many Coalition speakers in the parliament whenever issues of Aboriginal policy and proposed legislation were raised implied that they recognised this potency. Images of crisis and racial strife, disproportionate to the policies and issues debated, filled speeches from the Opposition. For example, to speak of “tensions and passions inflamed” of “living in fragile times” where the very “fabric of Australian society” was at stake, as the Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Roger Shipton and others using similar language did, seemed, in the absence of riots and other forms of violence in the community, an exaggeration

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35On the transformation of the ALP under Hawke and Keating see Dean Jaensch, *The Hawke-Keating Hijack: The ALP in Transition*, 1989; Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, ch. 1; and Stephen Mills, *The Hawke Years*, 1993. ch. 3. Reflecting a decade later on the implications of this shift for conservative/liberal parties, the former academic, speech writer for Malcolm Fraser, and prominent Liberal Party Minister, David Kemp, pointed to the difficulties the Coalition faced in re-establishing their constituency. See David Kemp “A Liberal Vision for the Next Century”, 1994, p. 47.
aimed at creating a sense of crisis in the populace. This is not to suggest that the Hawke Government’s actions and proposed actions were not deeply affecting to some members of the Coalition. Even if one were to recognise a level of cynical manipulation for political ends among Coalition politicians, one must also recognise that the feelings of crisis and of tearing asunder were nevertheless real for some people, both within and outside the parliament. The source of these feelings was a crisis in assimilationist views of the nation, and attendant crises of identity brought on by the political ascendancy of indigenising settler-nationalism. The transformation of the symbolic discourse surrounding the nation, especially when this was coupled with the attempt to extend land rights across Australia, meant that the (mostly paranoid-schizoid) defences of the phantasy social relations of white Australia were threatened, raising fears of societal breakdown and social chaos.

The debate over the handing back of Uluru to traditional owners was especially revealing in this respect, with many members of the Coalition, and conservative public figures outside the parliaments, accusing the Hawke Government of tearing at the heart of Australian nationalism, and damaging Australians’ sense of national identity through the “theft” of a central national icon. The 1985 ANOP survey Land Rights: Winning Middle Australia, commissioned by the Hawke Government, purported to reveal that “middle Australia” was angered and disturbed by the handing back of Ayers Rock, which “belonged to all Australians”. It had become, the survey argued, “one of the most powerful symbols against land rights.” The arguments in parliament ranged from accusations of lack of consultation with all interested parties, the overriding of Territory rights, and a dispute over who the site should have been handed back to, but the most interesting, and the most politically potent,

36 See Shipton’s speech when debating bills related to the handing back of Uluru to its traditional owners, CPD, HR, 16-17 May (overnight sitting) 1985, pp. 2635-37, which is replete with these images.


38 For example, Shipton was one of many who claimed that the Government was handing Uluru back to the wrong group of Aborigines. See CPD, HR, March 25, 1985, p. 848.
concerned the mapping out of "Ayers Rock" as a crucial national symbol that should belong to every Australian. David Connolly (Liberal Party MHR, Bradfield, NSW), for example, argued that we had a duty to protect the symbols of our nationhood:

[Uluru the park] brings together the age old traditions of the Aboriginal people and the modern perceptions of a young Australia—an Australia with people of many races and creeds. While Ayers Rock brings a perception of timelessness and continuity together with stability and pride in our nation, surely Ayers Rock is truly our country's symbol of solidity and strength and, as such, it must belong and be seen to belong to all Australians.

He claimed that the Opposition believed that it was in the interests of all Australians "that Uluru should be the focal point for racial harmony within this country." 39

The nationalist argument about Uluru was the mainstream Coalition position as can be seen from the comments of Roger Shipton (as the Shadow Minister for Aboriginal affairs) on several occasions.40 He drew on the testimony of the anthropologist T.G.H. Strehlow to argue that the rock as a geological formation was actually more significant to non-Aboriginal Australians than to the traditional owners, a "part of our psyche, because Australians feel deeply about it and love it."41 One of the most vociferous opponents of the hand-over was Michael Cobb (National Party MHR, Parkes, NSW), who referred to "the horror which swept this country when the present Hawke socialist government took this national symbol away from 99.99% of Australians." In a long speech he elaborated upon the reasons for this purported horror, referring to the deep emotional attachment that most Australians felt for the Rock. "It stirs deep feelings in all of us. A visit to Ayers Rock has become something that every Australian aspires to do. It has almost become a pilgrimage for some" he argued. He claimed that Australians had "become strangers in their own country" and that most were

39CPD, HR, May 16-17 (overnight sitting), 1985, pp. 2639-40.
40See for example CPD, HR, May 16-17 (overnight sitting), 1985, p. 2635; and September 15, 1985, p. 1130.
41CPD, HR, May 16-17 (overnight sitting), 1985, p. 2635.
outraged about the decision. A change of government, he asserted, would mean a reversal of the decision.\(^{42}\) Paul Everingham (Liberal Party MHR, Northern Territory) argued that Australians were watching angrily as the Government gave away a key national symbol—"the best known and best loved symbol of our Australian heritage." He saw the handing back as an accusation of cultural impoverishment of non-Aboriginal Australia. All of the natural wonders were culturally significant to non-Aborigines, just as they were for Aborigines. He raised the spectre of Australians becoming "tourists in their own land."\(^{43}\) Mr. Peter Slipper (NP, Fisher, Qld) compared the Government's 'disdain' for the Australian flag with its disdain for other key national symbols, like Uluru, the hand-over of which had been a "sell-out" of Australia.\(^{44}\) Wilson Tuckey (LP, O'Connor, WA) pointed to massive community opposition and shock at the transfer of "Australia's best known natural monument to an ethnic group [sic] with very limited proven rights to such an area. . ." He argued that Ayer's Rock was "a piece of every Australian's backyard" and that its handover would mean not only the partitioning of Australia, but would put "a mental partition in the minds of most Australians." He warned that this would lead to racial strife as Aborigines were perceived as thieves of the national inheritance. "No longer will the Aboriginal be seen just as socially different," he claimed, "he will now be seen universally as having taken something that belongs to all Australians."\(^{45}\) It was clear that for some people deep feelings were aroused. Everingham quoted from a letter that had appeared in The Australian newspaper in March 1985 in which the author wrote that the decision would "allow people to physically possess the spiritual heart of this nation," and was "a knife thrust that wounds every Australian."\(^{46}\) The point is not whether the rock actually had this symbolic meaning for "all Australians" before the proposed handover, but the way that through the political process and through enactment—the

\(^{42}\) CPD, HR, October 8, 1985, pp. 1603-4.

\(^{43}\) CPD, HR, May 20, 1985, pp. 2691-93.

\(^{44}\) CPD, HR, October 8, 1985, p. 1633.

\(^{45}\) CPD, HR, May 20, 1985, p. 2704.

\(^{46}\) The letter was published in The Australian, March 27 1985, and was quoted by Everingham, CPD, HR, May 20, 1985, p. 2691.
way it was spoken of as such, eulogised and mythologised—it became such a rallying cry for the nation, especially among those who felt themselves dispossessed.

Clyde Holding's response to such criticism was indicative of the power of this nationalist line of argument. In defending the hand-over as an important symbolic gesture towards Aborigines, Holding did not deny its significance as a national symbol, but rather sought to reintroduce it as a new national symbol for a reoriented nation which could incorporate Aboriginal history, myth, knowledge and sacred places: "...the average Australian is not losing Ayers Rock; he is gaining Uluru."47

One outcome of the greater visibility of the indigenous, and of their increased symbolic power—both of which the Hawke Government encouraged—was the way that Aboriginal identity and claims shifted from being a minor public issue to one that could be seen as a direct challenge to Australia's national identity. At the same time, such a view shifted from being something voiced, on occasion by those on the extremes of right wing politics, to occupy the centre of mainstream conservatism, and considered as a legitimate and pressing concern.

Despite angry opposition the Hawke Government went ahead with their promised hand-over of Uluru. Conservative opposition in the parliaments and in the media to the proposed national land rights legislation was more effective. Where it could be conceivably shown that by-elections and state elections fought on the issue of land rights showed that support for the latter was a negative electoral stance, the Hawke Government was inclined to compromise, to give mixed messages, and to prevaricate. Authors like Murray Goot and Tim Rowse have argued that the polls do not support the "backlash hypothesis" which the Hawke Government used to claim that the public was not willing to accept the national land rights agenda that it had proposed.48 Even if this were true, the fact remains that the political campaigning of the right during the mid 1980s against land rights kept it as an uncomfortably visible, and controversial, public issue for a pragmatic Government committed to maintaining, at the cost of Labor principles and the

47CPD, HR, October 10, 1985, p. 1797.
party platform, its electoral appeal. This was even more important
given the factional disputes within the Labor Party. Ronald Libby
argues that though national land rights had been written into the
ALP platform, and that a period of consensus reigned before and
after the 1983 election, this consensus began to unravel, along
factional lines, from the time Holding introduced his five principles
into parliament. What this illustrated, among other things, was that
within the ALP itself there was considerable difference of opinion
over what the pursuit of land rights meant, from those on the left
who argued for a fundamental moral position, to those on the right
who saw land rights in more pragmatic terms as something the
party should pursue, but not at the expense of losing public support
or, even worse, elections. The platform on land rights, Libby
contends, had really come into existence through the efforts and
influence of the socialist left in Victoria, led by Gerry Hand (who
would later take over from Holding as the Minister for Aboriginal
Affairs). It was opposed by some within the party as a sectional and
“trendy” interest, paralleling views in the conservative parties. The
Victorian ALP, dominated by the socialist left faction, was
“doctrinaire” on the question of land rights mainly, in Libby’s view,
because the ALP in Victoria had very little experience of
government, and because, unlike Western Australia, it had little
Crown land, or mining interests, under threat from Aboriginal claim.
At the other extreme edge within the party were those like Graeme
Campbell who argued, from what he claimed was a socialist position,
that minerals were for the benefit of all Australians. Only
“traditional” Aborigines, he contended, who had not lost their
connection with land, had any claim to any form of Aboriginal land
rights; even in their case governments should grant them pastoral
leases rather than “Aboriginal land rights”. The consensus, Libby

49In this respect the situation in Western Australia was crucial. In 1986 the
Hawke Government held 9 out of 13 federal seats in Western Australia, and
prior to the 1987 election if they lost these they would lose government. See
50On Campbell’s position see Libby, Hawke’s Law, 1989, pp. 15-16. See also
Campbell’s speech, in CPD, HR, October 13, 1983, pp. 1780-81; and the letter he
wrote to the ALP’s caucus Aboriginal Affairs sub-committee warning of the
dangers land rights presented for traditional ALP support, “Letter to the
argued, could only hold for as long as the platform was a symbolic
gesture towards Aborigines; once the effort was made to put the
principled stand into action, the different philosophical positions of
the factions on land rights came into open conflict.

An ALP committed to “responsible economic management” was
always going to lend a sympathetic ear to the forces that promised
to further Australia’s economic development. Hugh Morgan, as
Executive director of Western Mining Corporation, had sounded a
dire warning in May 1984. “If the doctrines and principles
underlying the Northern Territory legislation are applied to the rest
of the Commonwealth,” he argued, “then there will be no exploration
activity in this country, and ultimately no Australian mining
industry.” His argument suggested no possibility of compromise
with the Hawke Government over land rights: “We are entirely
legitimate in complete obduracy when such fundamental issues
are at stake.”\(^{51}\) In late 1984 Hawke took the lone decision, later to
be endorsed by Cabinet, to remove the Aboriginal right to veto
exploration and mining on their land in the proposed “National Land
Rights Model”, which effectively spelt the end of the initiative as far
as the indigenous were concerned. Hawke and others in his Cabinet
(Ministers Beazley, Evans, Walsh and Keating) were convinced that
land rights should not be allowed to stand in the way of mineral
exploration and mining. In place of the veto would be a tribunal
system of arbitration.\(^{52}\) The Preferred National Land Rights Model,
released in February 1985, did not have the support of the National
Aboriginal Conference (NAC) or the Aboriginal Land Councils, with
whom the government had been ostensibly negotiating. It did not
include Holding’s fifth principle (compensation for land lost), and
watered down the third and fourth principles. If accepted, it would
have significantly weakened the rights already achieved under land
rights acts in the Northern Territory, South Australia and New South

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influence Campbell’s concerns had on caucus and Cabinet, see Tim Duncan,

\(^{51}\) Hugh Morgan, “Religious Traditions, Mining and Land Rights”, speech at
annual seminar conducted by AMIC, May 1984, in Ken Baker, *The Land Rights

Wales. For this reason the NAC and the Land Councils decided to step away from involvement with the Hawke Government over national land rights.\(^5^3\) In response to discussions with mining company interests over proposals for land rights, the leadership of the ALP accepted during late 1985 the economic necessity of removing the right to negotiate over mining powers from the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. These decisions would seem at odds with the indigenising settler-nationalism that stood behind the whole land rights agenda.

The breakdown on national land rights, the programme that was to underpin the Hawke Government’s and the ALP’s efforts to institutionalise its indigenising settler-nationalism and so finally resolve (perhaps even as early as 1988, the bicentenary of European invasion) a long-standing source of national division, was a momentous failure and deserves close examination. The indigenous saw it as a form of betrayal, as did many ALP members committed to the party platform.

**The Collapse of the National Aboriginal Land Rights Initiative**

Clyde Holding had begun 1983 with the confidence of a man who felt that he had a people’s mandate to implement the Labor Party’s land rights platform. He had defiantly claimed that he would bring the States into line if they failed to adhere to the national land rights agenda of his government. By the 18th of March 1986, while defending Labor’s record on Aboriginal affairs, he had the invidious job of explaining an embarrassing breakdown which had been announced by Hawke to the National Press Club a few weeks earlier. In Holding’s speech explaining the breakdown, he seemed to partially embrace some of the arguments that had been made by those who opposed him. It had always been the ALP’s preference to get the States to enact their own legislation, he said. In the context of “ongoing dialogue and progress with the States”, he argued, “the Government has taken the view that the implementation of legislation based on the preferred model is not warranted at this time.” The Government had not backed away from its effort to

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obtain “secure title to land for Aboriginal Australians”, but it was “Labor Party policy that this objective be first sought by cooperation with the states.” In place of the stronger Aboriginal title, the Government would accept other statutory measures which gave the indigenous “secure title.” Earlier in the debate Holding would have denounced such an argument as unjust. He echoed the Coalition’s position in other ways too. In a direct plea to a section of the ALP’s own non-indigenous constituency who felt betrayed, Holding claimed that, while admitting the “emotional significance” of land rights for those supporting Aboriginal welfare, this was only one facet of what the Government was doing in the area. He ended on a note which was inclusive but, in the same spirit, played down the specificity of indigenous claims on the nation:

The future of Australia is bound up with the future of its Aboriginal citizens. We seek for them, as they seek for themselves, nothing more than what all Australians desire and believe in—a fair go from their fellow Australians.54

The Coalition considered the retreat a great victory. Responding to Holding’s speech the Coalition’s spokesman David Connolly gave two main reasons for the Coalition’s opposition over the previous two years: 1) that freehold title should be pursued for Aborigines, not in the form of land rights, but rather using existing state land legislation—as Connolly put it, government should not “impose separate land tenure systems on the basis of race”; and 2) that even this approach should be pursued only with ongoing community support. Connolly argued that the Hawke Government had lost that community support through their own “racially divisive” actions.55 The push for the same land tenure system to grant land to Aborigines was a significant retreat from the position established by the Fraser Government as represented in its passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976. The form of title embraced by that act was different to other existent titles, and this did not present the Coalition of the time with a problem concerning “race.”56

54Clyde Holding, Ministerial Statement, CPD, HR, March 18, 1986, pp. 1475-77.
55David Connolly, CPD, HR, March 18, 1986, p. 1477.
56The title which they had endorsed in their policy statement on land rights
Clearly, as some critics have argued, the federal nature of the Australian polity presented real difficulties for any national government attempting to introduce Australia wide land rights legislation.\(^5^7\) If the Hawke Government had proceeded there would have been court challenges from the states (as various federal and state politicians and leaders threatened), the outcome of which could not be guaranteed in advance. Nevertheless, the Hawke Government had formulated its initial position in the knowledge that there would be such conflict over states’ rights, as had been clearly evident from the struggles of the Fraser Government in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Opposition from one of their own in the form of Burke’s Labor Government in WA was an important reason for the backdown. Even so, the Hawke Government had believed that it would be able to get around difficulties with the states through the use of the external affairs power of the constitution [s.51 (26)], as had been successfully done with the stopping of the Franklin River Dam in Tasmania [Commonwealth v. Tasmania (1983)], and in the Koowarta case [Koowarta v. Bjelke-Petersen (1982)].\(^5^8\) One can draw a number of conclusions from the backdown.

It is clear from Hawke’s own comments and some of his actions after 1986 that he remained committed to indigenous causes and saw them as holding an important place in the future of the Australian nation. Hawke intervened, at some personal political cost, in June 1991 to stop mining at Coronation Hill. In doing so, he argued from a position of respect for the concerns of the local Aboriginal people (the Jawoyn) about the dangerous forces (the

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\(^{57}\)See Scott Bennett, Aborigines and Political Power, ch. 4.

serpent god Bula) that would be unleashed if miners were allowed to dig up the ground, placing these beliefs on a par with those spiritual beliefs endorsed by mainstream Christianity.\textsuperscript{59} In 1988 he signed the famous Barunga statement with indigenous leaders, calling for the negotiation of a treaty or compact between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.\textsuperscript{60} He was involved in the lengthy negotiations, between late 1987 and 1990, that resulted in the creation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), an organ, however flawed, for Aboriginal self-determination.\textsuperscript{61} His very last act as Prime Minister on December 20, 1991 was to preside over the ceremony placing the Barunga statement as a permanent display in Parliament House. In a tearful address he emphasised the profound need for a reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous.\textsuperscript{62} Yet between 1983 and 1986 he lacked the political will to engage in the difficult struggle to carry through the national land rights legislation. Hawke did not support Holding with the full force of his moral authority as Prime Minister, but instead acted on occasion behind Holding’s back to undermine him, leaving him to appear bumbling and ineffectual. It is of some consequence that Holding was not a member of the inner Cabinet, and was thus often shut out of decision-making. Despite

\textsuperscript{59} For Hawke’s own account of his motivations and actions, and the division in his Cabinet (he claimed that it was “the most intense and bitter Cabinet debate in my whole time in government”), and claimed that he would have resigned should Cabinet have overruled his decision), see R.J.L. Hawke, \textit{The Hawke Memoirs}, 1994, pp. 505-10, quote at p. 505. The leader of the Opposition, John Hewson, and representatives of mining interests ridiculed him for upholding the value of these beliefs, which they claimed were concocted to stop the mine in Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory. For an interesting commentary on the Coronation Hill controversy see Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs, \textit{Uncanny Australia}, 1998, ch. 4.

\textsuperscript{60}Hawke had been talking about the need for such a “compact of understanding” since 1987. See Scott Bennett, \textit{Aborigines and Political Power}, 1989, p. 155.

\textsuperscript{61}See Christine Jennett “Aboriginal Affairs Policy”, 1990, pp. 258-64, for a detailed discussion of the setting up of ATSIC.

\textsuperscript{62}For accounts see R.J.L. Hawke, \textit{The Hawke Memoirs}, pp. 435-6; and Stephen Mills, \textit{The Hawke Years}, 1993, pp. 295-98.
calls from indigenous groups and others, Hawke did not provide the funds to mount a strenuous counter-campaign against the anti-land rights campaigners to sell his government’s message. This failure to give the initiative the priority it deserved, and to devote to it the time and the energy required to negotiate what was, in Holding’s words, a fundamental shift in the 196 years of settler/Aboriginal relations, allowed too much political space to those forces rallying against the proposals. It allowed an atmosphere of things spinning out of control, promoted, as I showed above, by a variety of conservative forces and business interests, to develop. In contrast to the efforts of Holding and those on the left of the ALP to expand the inclusive language it began with, Hawke looked to the polls to get a sense of what the people were thinking and then, in the end, claimed that the people were not ready to accept land rights nationally.\textsuperscript{63}

In explaining this failure one might argue for a fundamental weakness in Hawke’s political character that had something also to do with his great political strength and popularity—his desire, and ability, to come in at the last minute to broker consensus between conflicting interests, rather than to do the hard work of building that consensus on the ground beforehand.\textsuperscript{64} Hawke did not use his considerable popularity (an unprecedented 75 percent approval rating in March 1984)\textsuperscript{65} to draw people behind the controversial initiative, and to contain those fears, angers and resentments building in the community. In the end, in the face of apparently irreconcilable and conflicting parties, he simply gave up. I think, however, that the underlying issues were more fundamental and lay beyond Hawke’s individual political character.


\textsuperscript{64}On Hawke’s political style see especially Stan Anson’s \textit{Hawke: an emotional life}, 1992.

\textsuperscript{65}Stan Anson, \textit{Hawke: an emotional life}, p. 156.
If we examine closely the nature of the argument against the legislation, successfully put forward by the mining industry and eventually, at least in a de facto sense, embraced by the Hawke Government, we can see the central importance of certain settler-nationalist claims in the eventual outcome. The economic development of the settler nation would take precedence over the claims of the indigenous for the protection of their land. As I indicated above, even before the national land rights agenda was dropped, the Hawke Government had moved to weaken Aboriginal control over mining; indigenous peoples considered that control fundamental to their land rights. The Hawke Government’s position on this was in stark contradiction to the discourse of cultural recognition central to its indigenising settler-nationalism.

Land rights were conceivable as just and even necessary within a nationalist discourse; accepting the indigenous fully into the nation involved reparation for the past, and reinforcing and giving of rights in the present. Where indigenous claims and aspirations were to be given some practical meaning, they were conceived in terms not only of natural justice for Aborigines, but in terms of the strengthening of a more inclusive nation, and in the service of bringing that nation to “maturity.” Land rights were also vehemently opposed by virtue of a nationalist discourse, albeit in different form. In either case it was assumed that there was a single sovereignty over Australia ultimately residing in the Crown. As Holding made clear at many times, and specifically in the 8th of December 1983 motion discussed above, sovereignty was never at issue:

... there is no issue of sovereignty and I have made it clear to Aboriginal peoples that neither the grant of land rights, nor the recognition of prior occupation and ownership, in any way puts Australian sovereignty in question. Given the opportunity, Aboriginal people will make their own future as citizens of the Australian nation, as we all will. Sovereignty is vested in the Crown and parliaments, for a single people united in the Commonwealth. The people who are so united under the Crown are all Australians.⁶⁶

⁶⁶CPD, HR, December 8, 1983, p. 3489. Aboriginal leaders generally applauded
These concepts of sovereignty and of a singular united political community, shared by all major political parties, were the source of ambivalent results for the indigenous. In a sense Holding’s emphasis might have been strategically useful in terms of diffusing the claims of those opposed to land rights who saw Australian sovereignty under threat and raised fears of division of the nation. In a psychoanalytic sense it might have helped to contain the unleashing of unconscious fears of bodily and self disintegration that are, as I argued in chapter 4, contained by the notion of a nation continent with clear boundaries dividing it from its ‘others’ and enemies. However, the implications ran also in a different direction, radically delimiting the extent to which land rights and the linked concepts of self-determination and self-government could be entertained. The Hawke Government proved unwilling to push the boundaries of the concept of national community as diverse and committed to justice, in the direction of the notions of coexistence or biculturalism implicit within some of its policy initiatives, but at odds with the actual legal, political and cultural traditions and assumptions underpinning the nationalist conception of political community in Australia. In the absence of a full and explicit recognition of the

Holding’s resolution and statement, but the emphasis on sovereignty was criticised by some leaders, including NAC Chairman Roy Nichols. See the report in *The Age*, “Holding pledges justice for blacks”, December 9, 1983, p. 3.

67 Holding saw the strategic necessity of leaving the question of sovereignty to one side in order to improve Aboriginal interests and to prevent opposition to progress in this area. See Clyde Holding, “Federal Government Policies and Initiatives”, November 1983, pp. 7-8.

68 Michael Rustin, in an insightful essay dealing with racism and anti-racism movements, has argued that containing or holding environments (spaces for “containment and security”) are needed in order to keep at bay the otherwise overwhelming fears and paranoias of the Kleinian paranoid-schizoid position, and the group processes Wilfred Bion explained emerged from his “fight/flight” basic assumption. The latter included intensified feelings of hostility to outgroups, sharper delineation of enemies, the tightening of group cohesion and the idealisation of the in-group, and the development of fighting positions. See *The Good Society and the Inner World*, 1991, ch. 3, especially pp. 71-79.
continuing sovereignty of Aboriginal political communities, the effort to pursue land rights was always limited by recourse to the concerns and interests of the broader national community. This went beyond the pragmatic claim, expressed by people of all political persuasions, that it was fatal to lose the support of the non-indigenous majority when pursuing indigenous interests. It extended to questions of “national interest” coming before justice for the indigenous, as it was simply assumed that the latter shared unambiguously in the same national interest as members of the one nation. That might have proved less of a problem if there had been a broad consensus on the importance of diversity and historical justice for the nation’s continuing development.\textsuperscript{69} But this was not so.

Finally, the indigenising settler-nationalism that supports notions of cultural diversity and recognition, and of historical justice for the indigenous as central to the maturing and improvement of the nation, has largely been an elite phenomenon in Australian political culture, and its adherents at the parliamentary level are prone to retreat in the face of the perception of public opposition, and other difficulties such as opposition from powerful mining, pastoral, farming and business interests. Some critics claim that, on both sides of politics, there has always been a gulf between rhetoric and actually implemented government policy.\textsuperscript{70} On the other hand, it can be argued that assimilationism has always been on firmer political, cultural and psychological ground and is thus always available as a powerful form of political rhetoric wherever policy initiatives appear to come into conflict with the interests of non-indigenous Australians. It is closer to commonsense notions about the equality of all, and to traditional Australian settler-nationalist beliefs about what holds a nation together. It rests on the kinship or

\textsuperscript{69}C.D. Rowley in his last, and posthumously published, book, expressed his frustrations at the lack of leadership of the Hawke Government in the pursuit of national land rights, suggesting a more elaborate conception of the national interest needed to be embraced by leaders. “The leadership of the nation”, he argued, “must learn to understand what the real interests of Australians are and to see that these interests require more attention to justice than the needs of the export trade.” See \textit{Recovery}, 1986, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{70} See Scott Bennett, \textit{Aborigines and Political Power}, ch. 2 and passim.
familial notions of nationhood which stress cultural similarity and common descent as the basis for solidarity. In relation to the specific issue of land rights and the protection of significant Aboriginal beliefs about the land, it dovetails with the structural basis of capitalist development in Australia—radical access to land and minerals as saleable, exploitable commodities—where indigenising settler-nationalism must argue against the grain of such economic logic, removing significant areas of land from the capitalist market.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{71} On the “religious” basis of the Woodward model of Aboriginal land rights, see Tim Duncan, “The State of the Debate”, 1985, p. 3.
Chapter Seven: Mabo, Wik and the Rise of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation

The decision of the High Court in *Mabo v. the State of Queensland (No. 2)* on June 3 1992 was a significant legal, moral and symbolic victory for Australia’s indigenous peoples.\(^1\) It changed the parameters of debate on Aboriginal land rights considerably. The very fact that the country’s highest court gave legitimacy to the concept of traditional indigenous rights in land, by undermining the concept of *terra nullius* and making legal the concept of native title, altered the ground from which land rights could be pursued by indigenous groups. Aboriginal plaintiffs now had a legal basis upon which to pursue land claims in the courts. For settler-Australians the implications were also significant. An important narrative concerning the creation of the Australian nation throughout the continent was undermined.\(^2\) The Mabo case had publicly focused attention upon the ambiguous nature and legality of the settler possession of the country, and raised the possibility that the property rights of some of the original owners might still exist in accordance with the common law.

The direct implications of the decision for the furthering of Aboriginal land rights in any sense close to what had been achieved in the Northern Territory or South Australia—let alone what indigenous people themselves aspired to—at this late stage (1999), remains to be seen. Justice R.S. French, as President of the National Native Title Tribunal, pointed to the limitations of native title, arguing that, as represented in common law, it might have little to

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\(^1\) The indigenous leader Noel Pearson argued that the Mabo decision was unique in that, unlike the various land rights acts through which governments presumed to “create” rights in land since the common law did not, after Mabo governments would have to accept that these rights were “inherent”. See Noel Pearson, “From Remnant Title to Social Justice”, 1994, p. 180.

do with indigenous beliefs about ownership and relationship to land, incorporating notions of extinguishment of that relationship alien to indigenous beliefs. Native title in common law was, he argued, “a thing of shards and fragments when measured against the richness, complexity and wholeness of the traditional relationship between Aboriginal people and their land.”\(^3\) Moreover, as Henry Reynolds has pointed out, the Mabo decision itself—seen by most people as a landmark, whether positive or negative—produced an ambiguous legacy. While it quashed *terra nullius* in respect of property, it preserved it in relation to Aboriginal sovereignty—i.e., the capacity of the indigenous to rule their own communities in accordance with their own laws. This is yet to be tested.\(^4\)

Despite, in many respects, its modest readjustment of Australian law, the Mabo decision precipitated a complex political crisis involving constitutional, legitimatory and ideological moments. This was not immediately apparent. It became so some twelve months after the decision, when it was clear that the Keating Government planned to legislate on the question of native title, in order to restore certainty to the community, and to move the reconciliation

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\(^3\) Justice R.S. French, “The Native Title Act 1993 and the National Native Title Tribunal”, 1994, p. 221.

\(^4\) See Henry Reynolds, *Aboriginal Sovereignty*, 1996, introduction & ch. 1. Evidence that recognition of native title in common law would do little to further the land aspirations of many indigenous people in the more settled areas seemed apparent in late 1998, when the Yorta Yorta people of the region on the Murray River at the border of New South Wales and Victoria lost their native title claim because, in the words of Justice Olney, their traditional link with the land had been “washed away by the tide of history”. Olney, in his explanation for the decision, asserted that the plaintiffs had lost their native title claim because, in the words of Justice Olney, their traditional link with the land had been “washed away by the tide of history”. Olney, in his explanation for the decision, asserted that the plaintiffs had lost their native title rights in the eyes of law and the state because they, in his view, no longer retained their “traditional” Aboriginal identity, customs and beliefs. To justify the continuance of those rights, the plaintiffs would have had to conclusively demonstrate that they were “Aboriginal” in accordance with the static Aboriginality recorded by ethnographers, like Edward Curr, in the middle of the nineteenth century. See *The Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v The State of Victoria & Ors* [1998] 1606 FCA (18 December 1998).
process forward. Once the Keating Government released its June 1993 discussion paper on Mabo the conservative ideological assault on the Mabo decision itself, and any legislative response except that which restored the pre-Mabo status quo, intensified. Many called for the decision to be overturned by legislation, claiming that the High Court had usurped the Parliament’s right to decide in a significant area of national interest. This crisis situation was partially resolved with the passing of the Native Title Act (NTA) in 1993, though hardly to the satisfaction of conservatives. The leader of the Opposition John Hewson claimed on the day the NTA was passed that it was Australia’s “day of shame.”

A new and more intense crisis, that drew response from broad sections of Australian society, was provoked by the High Court’s decision in *Wik Peoples v State of Queensland and Others* of December 23 1996. With four judges in favour and three against, the High Court ruled that, in principle, native title could co-exist with pastoral leases, to the extent that the former did not interfere with the activities provided for as the conditions of the latter. This time the reaction from conservatives, including some federal and state political leaders, was immediate. The calls for legislative overturning of the decision quickly followed the ruling, and the conservative anger at the High Court’s handling of the issue was palpable. The four-three ruling seemed to add to the feeling of uncertainty and to the anger of many conservatives. Some claimed that the ruling was unworkable and that the judges, in abdication of their duties, had handed the Australian population something they could not themselves satisfactorily resolve. Representatives of mining companies and pastoralists actively pressured the Howard Government, elected in March 1996, to “resolve uncertainty” by extinguishing native title on pastoral leases and by making other changes to the NTA.

Both the Mabo and Wik decisions ruptured the ideological formation of settler-nationalism. This rupturing was experienced by those occupying the two modes of settler-nationalism in different ways. For assimilationist settler-nationalism both decisions were a threat to identity and prosperity. They were perceived as the culmination of a long process of ideological realignment since the

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1970s, and the negative outcome of the critique of Australian history, colonialism and notions of progress. For indigenising settler-nationalism the decisions represented a productive opening that overcame, or at least responded to, past injustices; they provided the opportunity for constructive engagement and negotiation between settler and indigene in a post-colonial state. The decisions were read by indigenising settler-nationalists as long overdue indications that the nation was reaching “maturity”.

In this chapter I argue that the politics of settler-nationalism infused and, at certain points, drove the settler response to the Mabo and Wik decisions. Both modes of settler-nationalism responded to crisis by campaigning for forms of ideological closure that would re-legitimise the nation-state. For representatives of each mode the stakes were high. The intense level of emotion displayed during the periods of Governmental negotiation over the Mabo and Wik decisions related to the ways that Australian identity was implicated. Some critics have pointed to the “irrationality” of some of those responding to Mabo and Wik. Andrew Markus, for example, has argued that much of the conservative attack on the High Court over its Mabo decision was a form of irrationality, caused by contradictions in conservative thought concerning the recognition of Aboriginal property rights. The high Court had made the conservative argument against land rights unsustainable, he argues, resulting in a flight into the irrationalism of implicit or explicit racism.6 My approach views things differently, emphasising, rather, the continuing potency of different modes of settler-nationalism as political shaping forces in the major policy debates on Aboriginal issues.

Mabo and the Native Title Act 1993

The settler debates surrounding the Mabo decision, and the Keating Government response to it, involved a struggle between assimilationist and indigenising settler-nationalism. Mabo became a key symbol around which different visions of the nation, national belonging, community, and identity were fought out between the major political factions inside and outside of parliament. For the

6See Andrew Markus “Between Mabo and a hard place: race and the contradictions of conservatism,” 1996.
ALP the successful passing of the NTA carried the symbolic weight of national land rights, when in reality it meant far less. In this respect it served to ease the ALP’s sense of guilt and failure over the Hawke Government’s retreat from its national land rights initiative, rehearsing many of the same themes and arguments. The timing of Mabo was crucial to the form of the debates which came to surround it. The erosion of the historical link with Britain, exemplified by the intensification of the Republic debate, gave birth to a period of national questioning, with Prime Minister Keating prominently aligning himself with the forces of change, modernisation and national (Republican) renewal. The radical economic transformation undertaken by Hawke and Keating in the 1980s, the recession of the early 1990s (Treasurer Keating’s “recession that we had to have”), made for a climate of nervousness, and for those most hard hit by the globalisation of the economy, (the “redundant” unemployed, those workers in the manufacturing industry, and struggling farmers), fear and despair. A subsidiary, but important, contextual issue was the question hanging over John Hewson’s leadership of the Liberal Party. Any sign of weakness, compromise or prevarication on his part, in the face of a groundswell of conservative hostile opinion about the High Court’s decision and the Keating “adventure” in response to it, would contribute to the forces trying to unseat him. The Liberal-National Coalition, in its response to the Mabo decision and the Keating Government’s proposed Native Title legislation, is well characterised as a group driven by Bion’s fight/flight basic assumption. As Little argues, the fight/flight group demands a strong unmoveable leader in order to contain the panic just below the surface.8

The ALP responded to the Mabo decision by calling for parliamentary action that would further the process of reconciliation; their approach was to bring together the “land management” issue with the effort to bring the indigenous fully into an imaginatively reconstituted national community. In the Government’s Mabo discussion paper of June 1993, which set out a possible framework for a legislative response to the High Court

8Graham Little, Political Ensembles, p. 85.
ruling, this joining was made explicit. A chapter of the discussion paper was devoted to the link between Mabo and reconciliation. It was made clear that an adequate response to the ruling would result in a redefinition of the nation's identity:

The Mabo decision is widely seen as having implications which go beyond land management and the legacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dispossession. The decision is regarded as a landmark in the history of relations between indigenous and other Australians, with long term implications for the future identity of the nation.

As the preamble to the framework of principles appended to the document made clear, this rethinking of the nation's identity would involve a reconsideration of the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within contemporary Australia.

The Mabo decision was seen by the Keating Government as a major historical point at which the relations between indigene and non-indigene could be redefined. The sweeping away by the High Court of the *terra nullius* doctrine itself was seen as a major step towards reconciliation, since it meant a recognition of original Aboriginal ownership of Australian lands, and provided the opportunity to incorporate Aboriginal customary law and traditions as a source of Australian law. The notion of "bringing the nation to maturity" featured in many arguments in support of the High Court's decision and the Native Title Bill of 1993. Meeting such challenges would lead to a more cohesive nation free of historical grievance and advancing as one, albeit diverse, people. These themes were consistently raised and highlighted in the discourse of Keating and other government members, through speeches and comments in and outside the parliament.

The Keating Government's response to the Mabo decision was dominated by the affect of hope (perhaps, in certain respects, even

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10“MABO—The High Court Decision on Native Title,” pp. 98-9.
magical hope)\textsuperscript{13} and the desire to repair the damage done to the indigenous. It was a call for constructive, creative engagement with indigenous peoples in the service of a better nation. The Australian nation needed to be “made whole” through the closer meshing of non-indigenous with indigenous, in a spirit of the sharing of cultural and material “goodness.” It promised psychological relief through the unburdening of past guilt, (not necessarily held by the present generations), through a true act of reconciliation. The sentiments of Mr. Gibson (ALP, Moreton, Queensland) were echoed by many others during 1993:

On few occasions in a nation’s development is an opportunity provided to a society to correct a great social injustice or a grave misdeed. This year, in the International Year for the World’s Indigenous people, our nation has been offered such a chance. We have been given a fresh start to pass the test that we have been continually failing for more than 200 years—the test of extending to the indigenous people of this land the same opportunities and hopes, the same dignity and care, that we have offered to other peoples from around the world whom we invite to join our community.\textsuperscript{14}

In an address to the nation on the proposed Mabo legislation on November 18 1993, Keating seemed to suggest that the response to Mabo might finally resolve the long-standing colonial dilemma, and that settler Australia could wipe the slate clean:

With the challenge of Mabo effectively met—with native title efficiently brought within our land management system, we can move on. We can move on to see Mabo as a tremendous opportunity it is. An opportunity to right an historic wrong. An opportunity to transcend the history of dispossession. An

\textsuperscript{13}Ernest Schachtel described magical hope as rooted in the unconscious fantasy of return to an intra-uterine state of complete embeddedness and security and the complete satisfaction of all needs, as if by magic. He distinguished it from the more realistic forms of hope, rooted in the “attempt to understand the concrete conditions of reality.” See his \textit{Metamorphosis}, 1959, pp. 35-9, quote at p. 37.

\textsuperscript{14}\textit{CPD, HR}, November 23, 1993, p. 3420.
opportunity to restore the age-old link between Aboriginal land and culture. An opportunity to heal a source of bitterness. An opportunity to recognise Aboriginal culture as a defining element of our nationhood and culture—and to make clear that this Australia, this modern, free and tolerant Australia can be a secure and bountiful place for all—including the first Australians.\textsuperscript{15}

With this language of transcendence, of healing, of fixing things up once and for all, Keating's rhetoric suggested an art of the impossible—it was as if the past, "the history of dispossession" were still with us to be undone. A powerful fantasy, no doubt, and one that had the hint of a desire to be done with that bad past once and for all, so that "we can move on."

In the Keating Government's language of incorporation of the indigenous within a diverse nation one might see an example of that late colonial logic, by virtue of which a settler-colonial nation seeks to reposition itself in the face of a changed world. From outpost of European settlement suffering from the tyranny of distance,\textsuperscript{16} Australia might cement itself into the region by way of emphasising its indigenous past. In doing so, it might also emphasise its distinct identity within the world of nations. After all, Australia's Aborigines are unique to Australia. One might term this the indigenising of the nation. This needs to be seen as part of the broader processes of realignment attempted by the Keating Government. This realignment involved movement away from Britain, and more broadly Europe and the United States, and fuller engagement with Asia. Internally it involved a parallel movement towards a republic that can stand on its own feet, continue to develop its own unique identity and see itself, and its markets, in a more regional sense.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{15}Paul Keating, "Prime Minister's Address to the Nation," (18 November, 1993), 1993.

\textsuperscript{16}The evocative phrase was coined by Blainey in his book \textit{The Tyranny of Distance}, 1968.

\textsuperscript{17}Keating drew these connections in an address to his staff on election eve, March 12, 1993. Extracts from this address were published in "Keating Unplugged" in \textit{The Independent Monthly}, July 1996, pp. 69-70. The full text of the speech can be found in \textit{The Independent Monthly}, April 1993.
Keating suggested that Mabo was an opportunity for Australians to take in Aboriginal culture as “a defining element of our nationhood and culture.” The appropriation of “this oldest continuous civilisation on earth,” would immeasurably enrich the Australian nation.

If the Keating Government’s response to Mabo can be characterised as exhibiting features of Bion’s pairing basic assumption, and especially “messianic hope” (the belief that the resolution of a seemingly intractable conflict was close at hand), then the response from the Coalition, and much of the conservative side of Australian political life, can be characterised in terms of Bion’s fight/flight basic assumption. Anger; rage; a propensity to go on the attack and to flee from the complexities of an historical situation structured by the legacy of colonialism through an appeal to commonsense, simple truths, and other certainties felt to be under attack; the siege mentality, the air of crisis and fear of the unknown, and the view of compromise and negotiation as weakness; all point to the activation of the fight/flight response.

One can see this when comparing the Keating Government position to that articulated by John Hewson as leader of the Opposition. In his “Address to the Nation,” delivered on the same night as Keating’s address, Hewson claimed to be inclusive (as Keating had also done), recognising that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders had a legitimate viewpoint and needed to be heard. But the tone of the speech was alarmist, and for large parts of it he seemed to direct himself to a non-Aboriginal audience. Thus, in the context of the native title issue, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were effectively excluded from the nation, becoming a “they” who had a point, but whose claims were pitted against “our” homes, land and businesses, which had to be protected. Despite talking about the need for “one Australia,” and for all Australians to be treated equally, Hewson identified himself firmly with the settler community against Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. Claiming to address an undivided nation, he in fact underlined that fundamental division when he spoke directly and clearly to a non-Aboriginal constituency:
In good faith we have all bought homes and farms and opened businesses, absolutely confident that we would own them and could operate them without legal challenge.

The “we”, at least in this instance, was exclusivist. While there was no explicit recognition that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders formed a separate “we”, with a different set of concerns, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders clearly formed for Hewson a “they,” whose claims came up against “ours.” The curious feature of this speech was the way that the indigenous peoples slipped in and out of the “we” of the nation at different points. Thus, as part of the grouping “all Australians,” their level of health and well-being was a national disgrace, and yet they were also the “other” pitted against ordinary hard working Australians.

While recognising through his “face to face” talks with ordinary Aborigines that land did have special significance for some of them, Hewson claimed that their best interests would be served, not by Mabo legislation, but by improvements in health, education, housing and welfare, which were carefully separated off from the issue of land. While recognising the need for “a national resolve to address both the reality of Aboriginal and Islander disadvantage and the claims of these communities for greater recognition of their culture and heritage”, he separated land from these issues also. The speech contained a mixed message: on the one hand Aborigines would gain nothing, on the other they would receive vast tracts of land and billions of dollars. He claimed that Mabo would bring a “bonanza” for city lawyers, but not for Aborigines, but at the same time a lot of other Australians would be worse off. The other line, however, was that the Mabo legislation was dangerous because it would give Aborigines “vast tracts of land and billions of dollars that will solve absolutely nothing”, because we “can’t undo the wrongs of the past. . .” He finished the statement on an inclusive though coercive note:

Now is the time for all Australians—our indigenous people and those whose forebears came from elsewhere—to recognise that we all belong here.

#that we are all Australians

#that, as Australians, we need to help one another
#and that we need to keep an eye to the future, not so much to the past.18

The assimilationism of this speech, particularly evident in these concluding remarks, was central to the Coalition argument against the Mabo legislation. While Hewson mentioned the need for wider acceptance of cultural integrity, or the toleration of Aboriginal difference, the real emphasis was upon everyone being unequivocally, and homogeneously, Australian. In raising the prospect of a few Aborigines getting vast tracts of land, he echoed, and played upon, the splitting of Aboriginality characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid underpinning of assimilationist settler-nationalism. In his Second Reading Speech, delivered a few days after his “Address to the Nation”, Hewson split Aborigines more explicitly, into those “unrepresentative” leaders who were calling for Mabo legislation and native title, and those vast numbers of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, out in the bush, as it were, whose primary concerns were less about land, than about health, education, jobs and housing. The underlying implication, that he did not need to spell out, was that these were the “real” Aborigines, who were being misrepresented by the “political activists”; the latter, in the pursuit of their own political ends, knew nothing of, or ignored, “real” Aboriginal needs and aspirations. By emphasising that it was time for everyone to accept that “we all belonged here” Hewson implied that someone—he did not say Aborigines, though one wonders “who else?”—was suggesting that non-Aboriginal people did not truly belong, if it were granted the indigenous had distinct and separate rights to certain lands. The accusatory, forward defensive, attack against “persecutors” whose very assertion of identity is taken as an attempt to undermine settler Australian identity, is apparent in Hewson’s response.19

Though members of the Liberal and National parties sought to stress a unified response, there is evidence of different positions on

a range of questions raised by the Mabo debate. While many Liberal Party members voiced their support for the High Court ruling, and recognised the existence of native title, some Coalition members, particularly from the National Party, used the parliament and the media to dispute the High Court decision, and to deny the concept of native title. Michael Cobb, the National Party member for Parkes, NSW, referred to the Mabo decision as “an extraordinary display of adventurism” on the part of the six High Court judges (a seventh, Justice Dawson, dissented). They had usurped the law-making role of the parliaments in an “unprecedented act of judicial activism” creating law against the background of “205 years of settled land law”. He went on to point out historical and technical “flaws” in the ruling. Nevertheless, the Coalition was unified in the sense of its virulent opposition to the legislation proposed by the Keating Government. A common thread running through their opposition to the bill was the argument that there were two separate issues to be dealt with: the land management issue created by the High Court decision, and the reconciliation process. Politically, one could readily see why the Coalition wanted to separate these two issues. Their parliamentary support for the 1991 Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act meant that they had committed themselves to a concept of reconciliation. But what this seemed to

20 On these divisions between the Liberal and National parties, and within the liberal party itself, see Gwyneth Singleton, “Political Review: October-December 1993,” 1994, pp. 98-100.
21 There was not a uniform split between the Liberal and National parties over the recognition of the High Court decision and of Native Title. Thus prominent Liberal shadow minister Peter Reith, while accepting the High Court’s decision, did not welcome it as other Liberal members did, and admonished the High Court for its “judicial activism.” A similar response was made by Rod Kemp in the Senate. Alan Rocher (LP, Curtin, WA) was very critical of the High Court’s decision, claiming that the majority judges had created confusion, had not taken sufficient heed of public opinion when making its decision, and that some had used inappropriately emotional language which inflamed the racial situation. See CPD, HR, November 23 1997, pp. 3460-61. See also the critique of the High Court’s decision by Mr. Peter Slipper (LP Fisher, Qld), CPD, HR, November 23 1997, pp. 3474-75.
22 CPD, HR, November 24, 1993, p. 3587.
mean for many in the Coalition was that the indigenous needed to
curtail their political aspirations and reconcile themselves to their
fate as members of a single political community. As the debate over
Mabo and later over Wik and “the stolen generations” made clear,
there was much Coalition emphasis on the need, on the part of the
indigenous, for acceptance of past wrongs and to “move on” from
them. On the part of the non-indigenous community the duty was to
continue to pursue better outcomes for the disadvantaged
indigenous, in accordance with the approach taken to any other
disadvantaged Australians. What this stance avoided was any real
coming to terms with the past for the settler community. This
avoidance involved an ambiguous, even self-contradictory, set of
claims. One was that any evil done in the past had nothing to do
with the present generations; there could be no bringing to account
of the settler state for the deeds of others. On the other hand, many
making such claims argued that the evil in the past was in fact
exaggerated; the balance was far more in favour of good will and
action towards the indigenous. A third was that we, in the late
twentieth century, could not assess the morality of things done to
the indigenous in the past, because people thought differently then.
Moreover, previous generations were often acting in accordance
with the mores, the thinking and the laws of the time.23

23Consider for example the argument against the 1993 Native Title Bill put
forward by Michael MacKellar, the Liberal member for Warringah, NSW.
While admitting that terrible things were done to Aborigines in the past, he
argued that white Australians should not feel a collective sense of guilt for
any of those actions. Yet in denying that collective guilt, he also denied the
guilt of those in the past. It seemed that guilt could not fit anywhere into an
assessment of relations between settlers and the indigenous:
However, that fact [of atrocities and other actions carried out by
settlers against the indigenous in the past] does not, in my view,
mean that we now should hold a sense of collective guilt. Many of
the things that were done in the past were done with the very best
of intentions at the time. They are now seen as cruel, thoughtless,
totally discriminatory and foolish. But viewed through the eyes of
the people at that time, they were not so described. [My emphasis]
See CPD, HR, November 23, 1993, p. 3481. This confusing discourse about guilt,
it seems, is the product of a tension between a nationalist desire to see the
The view that any accession to distinct Aboriginal rights or needs would lead to the breakdown of the nation, was another prominent strand of ideological response of the Opposition in the debate over the Native Title bill. There were certainly conservative parliamentary members who did not take up an extreme position on this, but nearly all referred to the question of the potential divisiveness involved in treating any one group of Australians differently to another.24 It was argued within the Coalition's official statement about native title legislation that any recognition of land title that was different to what other Australians could be granted would mean that a fundamental unifying principle of the Australian nation—equality before the law—would be contravened, thus threatening national integrity. Some saw any Aboriginal claims to separate treatment as direct challenges to national sovereignty. The threat of Aborigines seeking separate nation status was raised by several Coalition parliamentarians, and others outside the parliament who opposed land rights. In an hysterical attack on the native title question, from the High Court decision to the actual legislation, the conservative writer Tim Hewat characterised those who supported Mabo as having the wider agenda of setting up a separate Aboriginal nation. In support he quoted approvingly from a speech by Bill Hassell, then president of the Liberal Party in Western Australia.25 In that speech (to the Samuel Griffiths Society

past as virtuous, and MacKeller's moral sense that certain actions in the past were wrong.

24One exception was the Liberal member for Boothby, South Australia, who was optimistic about the gradual process of the extension of land rights, criticised the exaggerated claims of other conservatives concerning the Mabo ruling, and saw the ideal situation as a partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. See CPD, HR, November 23, 1993, pp. 3488-3490. A similarly conciliatory tone can be found in the speeches given by the Liberal member for Sturt, South Australia, Mr. Christopher Pyne, CPD, HR, November 24, 1993, pp. 3513-3517, and The Liberal member for Adelaide South Australia Ms. Patricia Worth, on the same day, pp. 3573-3575.

25Tim Hewat, Who Made the Mabo Mess? The speech he quotes from is by William Hassell, to the Samuel Griffiths Society, 1993. This speech in itself contains some hysterical remarks and the elaboration of a conspiracy theory to explain the Mabo decision.
in 1993) Hassell argued that one could see signs of a conspiracy standing behind the decision, even if he admonished the judges for foolishness rather than active engagement in that conspiracy. He argued that they were nevertheless contributing to the agenda of secretive groups whose aim was the destruction of Australian society:

Some opponents of Aboriginal land rights and Mabo have made a consistent mistake over a long period. Their mistake is to see these things in isolation, to see them as individual things, to see them as separate and isolated claims upon our society. If we are to come to grips with Mabo we must see it as part of a wider agenda. It is beyond my comprehension to work out why the High Court should, wittingly or unwittingly, have become a party to the fulfilment of that agenda. Being generous, one must respectfully assume that the High Court was simply misguided, that the majority of Judges confused their responsibilities as judicial officers with their personal ideologies, that they were not part of the wider long term agenda which will inevitably lead, if followed, to a divided and damaged, and some would say destroyed, Australian society. Put very simply, the wider agenda is to create an Aboriginal, separate, sovereign state geographically within Australia, but not part of, or tenuously only a part of, the Australian nation. Once more the Aboriginal people are being used by people whose aim is to weaken and destroy the nation we know, for reasons which can only be assumed to be as inverted, perverse and obscure as those which have driven Marxists and other totalitarian thinkers in all ages.

The paranoid style of thinking I highlighted in my discussion of assimilationist settler-nationalism is here pervasive. The direct appeal to an achieved historical identity as the benchmark against which to measure any proposed action is explicit. The acceptance of native title, or any other concession to indigenous rights, would lead, by stages, to “the end of Australia as we know it.”

The same arguments were voiced by other prominent conservative figures and politicians. The Liberal Shadow Minister for Science, Technology and Export Development David Kemp, in a speech prepared for parliament but never delivered (because debate on the Bill was guillotined by the Government at 9.00 pm on November 25 1993), went right to the heart of the question of difference and how the nation should deal with it. In contrast to the Keating Government’s position, Kemp raised the threat of the disintegration of the nation if its people acceded to the Aboriginal rights which he saw as both explicitly and implicitly contained in the proposed Native Title legislation. Apart from the threat to development, he highlighted what he saw as a very real threat to the nation’s integrity through notions of Aboriginal self-government and self-determination. These questions, he argued, were at the very centre of the debate. Fundamentally, in his view of the nation, there was no room for difference of the kind he saw as being advocated by some Aborigines and non-Aborigines. He took as fundamental points of departure notions of *individual* liberty and equality in the one state. The question of whether the state had the right to decide for Aborigines simply did not arise within his discourse—Aborigines lacked legitimacy as political groups. For example, he argued against the Keating Government’s proposal for the setting up of a land fund under the Native Title Act to buy land for indigenous people who had lost their native title, on the grounds that it was based on inequity for non-Aborigines. In his view the land need of Aborigines not “traditionally connected” with the land was no greater than that of other Australians—all Australians should be on an equal footing. He also discussed the land fund in terms of disadvantage, the only other justification he could see for setting it up. But any attempt to set up such a fund for Aborigines *only* was racist, in his view. This was because every person should be equal in the eyes of the state and if the Government provided funds for one group of disadvantaged people, he argued, it should provide them to all. Difference was denied by gathering all disadvantaged people together. “Throwing land” at disadvantaged people, whether

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27David Kemp “The Native Title Bill: A Foundation for Division”, 1993. I have a typescript of this speech (dated November 25 1993) that was circulated among the Young Liberals of Victoria.
black or white, was no solution, he asserted, since problems of disadvantage were problems of "cultural attitudes." Through this flattening out of differences Kemp sought to deny the unique historical circumstances that divide Aborigine from settler. "Difference" was dangerous to the nation because it promoted separation. Thus any sense of self-determination, that was not conceived in the classical liberal sense of individual self-determination of those areas of life which did not directly concern the state, was the thin edge of the separate sovereign status wedge—and should be feared for this reason.

A similar speech was delivered in the Senate by David Kemp's brother Rodney. Reminding us of Henry Parkes' famous "One People: One Destiny" speech of the late nineteenth century, Senator Kemp argued that the Mabo bill was a direct attack on our founding father Parkes' philosophy, and concealed a separatist agenda:

There is a move to encourage the United Nations to reinterpret the self-determination clauses in human rights conventions so that they apply to indigenous peoples who are already part of a sovereign country. Such a reinterpretation would enable Aboriginal radicals to argue that they had a right to establish a separate Aboriginal nation.

Despite the fact that mainstream Aborigines did not advocate separatism, there were those who "rather than talking about one people with one destiny, would see a divided nation with separate identities." Kemp endorsed and championed an image of the nation containing two critical principles; firstly, that all people, regardless of race or ethnicity, were to be treated as one and equal under the law; and secondly, that there was a community of interest between all groups, with all moving forward as a single group with a single destiny. In an attempt to justify this image of the nation Kemp claimed the authority of Henry Parkes, neglecting to point out, however, that Aborigines were not included in Parkes' nation. In his view, the Australian people would "not accept a position which allows for two people with two destinies."28

In a broad sense, the spectre of division confronting an imaginary unified nation “haunted” much of the mainstream conservative response to native title legislation. Whether the politicians and others expressing these fears genuinely felt them or not is beside the point. The fact that this imaginary unified nation was seen as a major stake in the debate, and one which would reverberate with the public, is important. The supporters of native title legislation, from members of the Keating Government to non-parliamentary public figures and members of the general public, also took part in a discourse about divisiveness, seeing the legislation as a way of solidifying the unity of the nation, through taking the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians a step further. To this extent it can be seen that all the major parties were unified by their belief in the existence of one indivisible nation, through which the indigenous might voice their claims. The justification for those claims, to a significant degree, had to be measured against their capacity to hinder or enhance the nation on its road to equality, progress, moral virtue and maturity.

Despite the opposition, and heated debate in the press and public forums, the Native Title Act was passed in December 1993. One of the more important features of the complex negotiations surrounding the Native Title legislation was the direct involvement of (selected) indigenous leaders in the eventual outcome. They were treated by Keating and his colleagues as legitimate stakeholders whose views had to be considered, and whose consent was fundamental to a negotiated settlement. Through their Peace Plan, agreed to in its essence by the Keating Government, indigenous leaders gave up a great deal, through the acceptance of the validation of post 1975 land titles, many of which they could have fought through the courts. In exchange, the Keating Government agreed to a social justice package, the creation of the land fund, the right of native title holders and applicants to negotiate over mining, and the possible conversion of certain pastoral leases into native title. What this negotiation represented—notwithstanding the

29 Some critics at the time and later argued that it was too much.
criticisms of those who saw it an example of state co-option of the indigenous—was an important form of state recognition of indigenous interests and political legitimacy, and a respect for the views of the indigenous leaders and the decision-making processes of indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{31} It was exactly these forms of recognition that were absent in the Howard Government's response to the Wik decision.

A second important feature of this period was the leadership of Paul Keating. In contrast to Bob Hawke's political style during the aborted national Aboriginal land rights initiative, Keating seemed fired by the historical and moral significance of his Government's response to Mabo. Many at the time, and in later assessments, criticised him for his "recent enthusiasm" for Aboriginal issues, and cast doubt on his genuineness and motives. Some accused him of seeking his own political grandeur through the pursuit of a big issue. However, in his speeches and actions inside and outside of the parliament (some of which I explored in chapter 4), he took the lead in pushing the political agenda, no matter what the cost to his own political fortunes. This, I think, indicates how integral the indigenising element was in Keating's nationalism, rather than Keating's political opportunism. Symbolic of Keating's assessment of the significance of indigenous issues was his drawing in of the pursuit of reconciliation to his Prime Ministerial responsibilities, and his close working relationship with his Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Robert Tickner. He fought hard with the states and their leaders, including Labor Premier Goss in Queensland, over the formulation and passing of the NTA. He faced down calls from Western Australian Premier Richard Court and others for a Referendum on the extinguishment of native title. He accepted a legal battle in the High Court over the Native Title legislation and the validity of Richard Court's attempt to outmaneuver it with his Government's \textit{Land Titles and Traditional Usage Act} of 1993. He negotiated directly with mining, pastoral and Aboriginal interests, achieving what many at the time saw as a remarkable agreement from the National Farmers' Federation under

\textsuperscript{31}See the indigenous leader Mick Dodson's comments to this effect, in "Towards the exercise of indigenous rights: policy, power and self-determination", 1994, pp. 71-2.
the leadership of Rick Farley. \textsuperscript{32} Finally, he pushed the legislation through despite continuing opposition from mining industry representatives like AMIC. \textsuperscript{33}

The fact that many in the Coalition could only read Keating's actions as political opportunism or grand-standing, indicates the strength of their positioning within assimilationist settler-nationalism. From that position, they simply could not comprehend that Keating, and others, really believed what they said about the nature of Australian identity, and of the need to make reparation with the indigenous in order for that identity to develop. Because Keating and his followers "could not mean it", then his and their motives had to be more devious. The conservative opposition to the Native Title legislation was virulent and unbending to the very end. The hope articulated by many on the side of the Keating Government in the debate could only be read by the Opposition as dangerous folly. Fight/flight played a role here fed by the powerful intellectual, ideological and emotional resources of assimilationist settler-nationalism. Those in the Coalition who attempted to steer along a less oppositional, and more constructive path, were pulled back into line and eventually acknowledged the need to separate Mabo from reconciliation.\textsuperscript{34} Keating had become for some on the Labor side of politics, and for some indigenous people, a lone, courageous, truth-telling and almost messianic figure who could carry through the seemingly impossible task of resolving the

\textsuperscript{32}For Rick Farley's personal account of the negotiation and his assessment of the Native Title act, see "The Mabo Spiral: A farm sector perspective", 1994.

\textsuperscript{33}For the details of the opposition to the NTA from a mining perspective, see Geoffrey W. Ewing (Assistant Director of AMIC) "Terra Australis post Mabo: for richer or for poorer?", 1984.

\textsuperscript{34}As Tim Rowse has pointed out, two important "wets" in the Liberal Party, Hewson's deputy Michael Wooldridge and the Shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Peter Nugent, had initially favoured the idea of drawing a link between the Mabo decision and reconciliation, but were later pulled into line. See "How we got a Native Title Act", 1994, pp. 116-7. Peter Nugent admitted in his speech on the Native Title bill that, though he believed that land matters and the reconciliation process should be treated separately, he had initially hoped that the symbolic power of Mabo might resolve some long-standing issues. See \textit{CPD, HR}, November 23 1993, p. 3434.
colonial dilemma—a leader of Bion’s pairing group or Little’s Ensemble. He, and anything that he advocated in the area of indigenous affairs, came to represent, for the Opposition in fight/flight mode, that which they needed to defend themselves against, as if for the very survival of the Australian nation. No doubt Keating’s own combative and vitriolic style when dealing with Coalition politicians, and his ascendancy over many of his opponents made him and what he advocated anathema to many of them. During the Mabo debate he was hated and derided by his opponents for the hope that he represented, and the expectations that he raised of finding a creative solution. The Coalition in their “Mabo Issue Paper” of June 1993 criticised Keating for raising “unrealistic expectations” among Aborigines, pastoralists and miners. He had given Aborigines the hope that they might claim “vast tracts of land.” Miners and pastoralists had been led to believe that the Government would provide a rapid resolution to the problems raised by Mabo. Keating was blamed and hated for representing ideas and feelings, like national regret and sorrow, and a new relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous to be built from that recognition, that the Coalition, since the early 1980s had, in the main, turned against and repudiated as weak and dangerous in the context of an imperiled (according to their ideology) nation-state.

Wik and Howard’s Ten Point Plan

The High Court handed down its decision in the case of the Wik people of Northern Queensland at the end of 1996. This was long regarded as a test case to establish whether pastoral leases extinguished native title, since the High Court in Mabo (No. 2) had left the question unresolved. The issue was further complicated by the fact that many pastoralists believed it was the intention of the Keating Government’s Native Title Act 1993 that pastoral leases would be included under the clauses referring to leases which extinguished native title. Certain statements in Keating’s Second

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35See the extracts from the Coalition’s “Mabo Issue Paper,” released by the Coalition’s Sub-Committee on Mabo 28 June 1993, in Goot and Rowse, Make A Better Offer, pp. 229-32.
Reading Speech appear to support this claim.\textsuperscript{36} Two political changes were central in creating the context in which the Wik decision was received. The first was the fall of the Keating Government and its replacement by the conservative Coalition Howard Government in March 1996. The second was the coinciding rapid rise of a new right-wing political movement under the leadership of Pauline Hanson.

Hanson had been disendorsed by the Liberal Party because of remarks about indigenous affairs during the 1996 election campaign, but managed to win the seat of Oxley in Queensland as an independent with a considerable swing away from the ALP. During 1996 and 1997 her views gained massive media exposure and attracted extensive political commentary. She articulated a vision starkly opposed to indigenous aspirations, and called for a retreat from the “racially divisive” policies pursued by governments of all political persuasions since the 1970s. During her 1996 election campaign she was quoted as saying that she “would be fighting for the white community, the immigrants, the Greeks, whoever, it doesn’t really matter—anyone apart from the Aboriginals and the Torres Strait Islanders.” She subsequently dedicated her election victory to the “white community.”\textsuperscript{37} To an extent her extremist andalarmist statements on Aboriginal affairs, though volatile and difficult to contain, were a useful tool for a Coalition wanting to redraw the boundaries of settler/indigenous relations. If one thinks

\textsuperscript{36}Henry Reynolds, in response to a question at the end of the Kate Fitzpatrick Memorial Lecture at Melbourne University, on May 28, 1997, said that in conversation with Aboriginal Affairs Minister Robert Tickner around the time of the Native Title Bill being debated in parliament, he had stressed to Tickner that he should not say that pastoral leases extinguished native title as it was not at all clear that they did. Tickner had responded emphatically that all of the advice from the Attorney General’s office confirmed that the pastoral leases did extinguish native title. While the Keating Government was still in power Reynolds claimed that many in Cabinet wanted to extinguish native title on pastoral leases across Australia. See Henry Reynolds “Affirm, not extinguish, Aboriginal rights,” \textit{The Australian}, January 9, 1996.

through the ideological changes mapped in the previous chapter, and evident as I have just shown in the opposition to the Native Title legislation, one can see that Hansonism in some aspects was close to what had become the mainstream or ascendant Coalition position: emphasising that any accession to indigenous demands threatened the fabric of the nation; arguing that a kind of reverse racism had replaced traditional racism against the indigenous, leaving the traditional white national at a disadvantage; criticising the rise of “Aboriginal industries” led by “wealthy” Aboriginal bureaucrats who “cared little” for their poorer community members; and claiming that “political correctness” stifled debate on race matters. Her many interventions echoed previous (and some contemporary) Coalition statements, sometimes, though not always, in a more extreme, angry or paranoid form. This was troubling for the Coalition because her discourse was free of the ambiguities that often shrouded its rhetoric, and revealed the exclusivism implicit in that rhetoric, but useful because it allowed the Coalition to force through hard-line positions as a supposed new compromise.38 The Coalition was able to present itself as the mediator between a public backlash (evident in the support for Hanson) and what indigenous peoples were asking for. Howard’s response to the Wik decision represented a significant reduction of the rights achieved by indigenous people under the Native Title Act, but was portrayed as a political compromise between competing interests in a new political climate. Jeff Kennett, the Liberal Premier of Victoria, expressed such a view when he addressed the Reconciliation Convention held in Melbourne in May 1997:

You may not agree that the 10 point plan goes as far as you would wish, but I say, having a look at all the options at the moment, it is the best thing we have going for us, all of us. I understand your response, but can I say this, if you are not prepared to work with it, then you run the risk of losing Wik and you run the risk of giving to [Pauline] Hanson and others the power that they do not have today.39

38 Prime Minister John Howard put it this way many times.
Howard’s Ten Point Plan included: more stringent testing of the right to make native title claims (the registration test); a sunset clause limiting all new native title claims; the removal of the right to negotiate over mining on pastoral leases, and a diminution of that right elsewhere; and the extinguishment of native title under certain pastoral leases, or possibly by stealth through the upgrading of certain activities on such leases, under the “primary production” definition, which would interfere with many native title rights and activities not interfered with under the normal pastoral lease conditions. Some of these changes had been canvassed by the Howard Government in 1996, under plans to amend the NTA, i.e. before the Wik decision had been handed down.

The startling rise of Hanson and her One Nation Party (launched in April 1997) caused alarm within the Liberal and National parties as it became evident that she was leeching away Coalition rather than Labor Party support.\textsuperscript{40} Her appeal to rural voters was not just in terms of her opposition to much extant Aboriginal policy, but in terms of a range of anxieties about globalisation, market forces, the loss of traditional white Australian identity (in the face of the “conspiracy of multiculturalism”), and anger at the perceived division between the intellectual political elite and the ordinary, hard-working but largely “forgotten” and “neglected” white Australian. The National Party’s constituency is located for the most part in rural areas. The National Party leadership’s response to the Wik decision needs to be understood in the context of the threat from the rise of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation, and longer term effects such as the slow decline of rural industries, and the near crisis culture that has developed within the rural belt.\textsuperscript{41} National Party supporters believed that they had been

\textsuperscript{40} As shown in various polls published in newspapers. See Carol Johnson “Pauline Hanson and One Nation”, 1998; Bob Howard “Political Review: September 1996—March 1997,” 1997, p. 85.

\textsuperscript{41} See for example Dennis Woodward “The National Party”, 1994.
effectively ignored by the Coalition’s gun reform measures in the aftermath of the Port Arthur massacre.\textsuperscript{42} The issue of Wik, and the call for Governmental extinguishment of native title by grassroots and prominent National Party members,\textsuperscript{43} needs to be seen in the light of the feeling, among National Party supporters, that they were not being heard within their own government. The issue of Wik presented itself as an issue on which the supporters could demand proof that their leadership was serving their interests.

In this respect Hanson made a direct appeal to pastoralists and farmers, at times pitting farming interests unambiguously against the interests of the “Aboriginal industry”—a derisive term she appropriated from mainstream conservatism—and its supposed representatives like ATSIC, in a zero-sum game. In the speech launching her party in April 1997 she spoke directly to farmers:

> In Rural Australia, 30 families leave the land every week. Without change, we will lose 24,000 farmers to the welfare queues. Will the government then import even basic crops, perhaps rice, to get us more used to it. Think of the difference some of the more than A$30 Billion given to ATSIC would have made if used to help Australian farmers, rather than being unaccountably squandered, with no apparent improvement to the plight of indigenous Aborigines.\textsuperscript{44}

Such an ideological stance had great appeal in rural communities and paralleled the ideological position of the major organisations representing farmers and pastoralists. In an infamous advertisement screened nationally in 1997 the National Farmers’ Federation displayed a black and a white child playing the game

\textsuperscript{42}On April 28, 1996, not long after the Howard Government had been elected, a gunman (Martin Bryant) killed thirty-five people, and seriously injured nineteen others, at Port Arthur in Tasmania. In the aftermath, a broad political consensus developed between the two major parties, the Greens and Democrats, and the public, for tighter gun controls. The main resistance came from the gun lobbies, and from the grassroots of the National Party.

\textsuperscript{43}Of the leaders none were more strident than Queensland Premier Bob Borbidge, Queensland MHR Bob Katter and Northern Territory Federal Senator Bill O’Chee.

\textsuperscript{44}Pauline Hanson, “Speech at Launch of One Nation,” April 11, 1997.
“twister” on a map of Australia: the obvious implication was that if the Wik decision was allowed to stand, the black child would win out.

The settler-nationalism Hanson represented, though it shared certain features with populist right-wing and racist movements in western democracies throughout the world, had this distinguishing feature: while it spoke to a variety of familiar right-wing populist concerns, it honed in especially on the very weakest point of settler-nationalism—the unresolved and competing claim over the territory between the settler and indigenous communities—and attempted to shout the dilemmas out of existence in the name of common sense. Her constant defensive assertions of white or Anglo-Celtic national legitimacy, and her focus upon those “enemies” whom, she claimed, questioned the legitimacy of her, and other settler Australians’, identity, have been most consistently directed at the indigenous. It is the indigenous whose identity or identities she, using a strategy drawn from conventional forms of settler-nationalism, has consistently questioned and attempted to circumscribe, through her attacks on ATSIC and any form of what she terms “race based” policy or legislation. It is the indigenous who she most directly addresses when she seeks to defend her own identity as Australian. At her 1998 election speech at the Stockman’s Hall of Fame in Longreach, Central Queensland, she put this starkly:

We Australians are a young people and our nation relatively new when compared to others but our love of this land is as great as anyone’s love of their place. You cannot claim more attachment to a place because your ancestors were here first. You cannot claim a greater sense of belonging because your relative was here before the relative of another. You cannot claim to be more Australian than those who have lived here just as long as you have. I speak of course of the Aborigines and their much publicised right to this and because their forefathers are said to go back tens of thousands of years. Does an Aborigine who is the same age as I am and was born here as I was, have anymore feel for the land or cherish its beauty and ruggedness more than you and I do? Would an Aborigine fight any harder to defend Australia than you or I would? Does
anyone think migrants who have become loyal Australian citizens have less claim or love for this country than someone of Aboriginal descent? We Australians are a people of multi-racial origins but we must stop this division by race.45

One of the more striking features of the public debate surrounding Wik was the call for certainty, and in a related way, for a simplification of the complexity that Australians faced because of the history of colonisation. The call for certainty from pastoralists, miners and conservative leaders including the Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer, began almost immediately after the Wik ruling. Hanson and her associates were, in this respect, well within the camp of mainstream conservatism. To an extent, the appeal to certainty expresses one response to the experience of late modernity (or more specifically late capitalism), which social theorists like Anthony Giddens have likened to riding a juggernaut. While the ride might be exciting, Giddens suggests, it is also intensely fear arousing; the driver of the juggernaut has to live with the fundamental doubt over his or her ability to control the vehicle. Late modern society is therefore a high risk society, and its members must learn to live with and accommodate high levels of anxiety.46 The fear is that the world is spinning out of anyone’s, and especially government’s, control as the forces of globalisation transform local environments, sweeping away what passed yesterday for tradition, identity or a whole way of life. The doubt over what Aboriginal native title would mean for settler Australians is experienced by some as an intolerable burden, resulting in the simplistic call for its wholesale removal from the national equation. Hanson, for example, saw the politics of native title as a “shameless grab for land” by the (mostly phony) indigenous, and suggested that we simply condemn it to the dustbin of history. In her speech at Longreach (mentioned above) remarkable for its overall appeal to the simplification of the complex issues faced by the Australian nation-state (including a direct appeal to simplicity: “My simple points over what some believe to be complex issues were only the

45Pauline Hanson, election speech at Longreach, September 11, 1998.
commonsense you would hear from any ordinary Australian . . .”) she claimed that: “Under One Nation policy the issue of Aboriginality would no longer exist as benefits by virtue of race would no longer exist”, arguing that the assertion of Aboriginal identity was largely a result of the government benefits “so-called” Aborigines coveted.47 At one point early in the negotiations over his Wik amendments, in April 1997, Prime Minister Howard grew tired of the difficulties involved in reaching a settlement between all affected parties, and threatened to extinguish native title completely on pastoral leases which, he argued, would be the simplest thing to do and would provide the most certainty for pastoralists and miners. Two months earlier his deputy Tim Fischer called for legislation to overturn the High Court’s decision and to extinguish native title on pastoral leases, a position both he and John Howard were forced to retreat from for legal and monetary reasons.48

Looking at the Wik decision itself, it is less than apparent where the “uncertainty” of pastoralists, let alone other settler-Australians, came from. The majority ruling clearly stated that while native title could coexist with pastoral leases, where the pastoral interest came into conflict with native title interests, the pastoral interest would prevail.49 This was reiterated time and time again in the public domain by political figures, indigenous leaders, the legal profession, journalists, academics and other commentators; and yet the call for certainty became the driving ideological element of the debate.

Through their opposition to the Wik decision and their support, with reservations, of Howard’s Ten-Point Plan (which they believed did not go far enough to protect their interests), farmers and pastoralists were expressing not only their opposition to land rights, but a number of other fears, concerns and complaints: their reaction to the instability and uncertainty of their industry, of their being a

47 Pauline Hanson, election speech at Longreach, September 11, 1998.
the mercy of world markets, world trade competition, and the natural elements; the perception that the populations in the cities took agricultural production for granted, and an envious perception that those in the cities had everything, including certainty, where the rural sector faced untold hardship, isolation, and the decline of a way of life. All of their anger and resentment was then focused upon something they believed that they could control—native title. There was another interest involved too. By pushing a Government receptive to their message pastoralists (as opposed to farmers) stood to gain a far more secure leasehold than they could ever have imagined having, and would improve their position by being given the opportunity to carry on many farming activities which were never included under the design and provisions of pastoral leases—i.e. approximating freehold. The call for extinguishment of native title was taken up as a defence of all farmers. This included John Howard’s plaintive cry on a number of occasions during 1997 that he would never let Australia’s farmers down, a remark which he

50 In a letter to the editor a pastoralist complained that the Mabo and Wik decisions were unfair, in that they discriminated between types of land holding when talking about extinguishment of native title. “Should not the uncertainty and costs be shared by all Australians?” he argued. See Andrew Nicholson in *The Australian*, January 8 1997, p. 10.

51 Howard made this comment to a liberal luncheon on April 15 1997 at the height of the Wik negotiations. See Laura Tingle, “Aborigines reject PM’s Wik plans”, *The Age*, April 16 1997. He uttered words to the same effect claiming that none were closer to his heart than Australia’s farmers when he, together with his National Party Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer, addressed an angry crowd of two thousand pastoralists and farmers from the steps of the Stockman’s Hall of Fame in Longreach, central Queensland, on Saturday May 17 1997. This was part of the effort to sell Howard’s Ten Point Plan on Wik and to explain why the government was not pursuing “blanket extinguishment” of native title on pastoral leases, which pastoralists and many in the National Party had called for. See media reports: “PM and deputy ride into town to sell Wik” and “Outback aristocrats promise PM a spine-tingling ordeal” *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 17 1997, pp. 1 & 9 respectively; “Poll Threat over Wik” *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sunday edition *Sun Herald*), May 18 1997; and “No movement at the stations as the PM makes his plea”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 19 1997, p. 5.
did not match in relation to Australia’s indigenous peoples. Most farmers can be distinguished from pastoral lessees, holding freehold title to their lands, which unambiguously extinguished native title according to the Mabo and Wik decisions. Though many journalists and other commentators pointed this out, the Howard Government leadership did not seek to separate the interests of farmers and pastoralists in the debate.\textsuperscript{52} This strategy, though it ignored or downplayed the legal realities of the Wik decision, was politically effective in pursuing a line of “bringing the pendulum back” after it had “swung too far in favour of the indigenous”, as Howard, echoing Geoffrey Blainey, frequently argued.\textsuperscript{53}

The reasons for this joining were complex, involving political calculation but also nationalist ideological positioning. By joining farmers with pastoralists Howard greatly increased the numbers and types of people concerned. It would have been more difficult to argue for the necessity of the changes to the NTA if those concerned could be portrayed as a small wealthy elite pitted against impoverished groups of Aborigines.\textsuperscript{54} In speaking of the farmers he would never let down, Howard was sending a message to National Party, and thus Coalition, supporters—this was their Government, the government of “traditional” Australians. In doing so Howard tapped in to a key nationalist myth about the development of Australia, connecting farmers with the pioneers who had struggled with and “subdued” the land in the service of building an Australian

\textsuperscript{52}The academic and social commentator Judith Brett emphasised this distinction in “Handy hints for Howard on native title test”, \textit{The Age}, April 24, 1997, p. A17.

\textsuperscript{53}The Wik decision itself, Howard argued, had swung the pendulum too far in favour of the indigenous, and he saw it as his job to bring it back to a fairer position. See his “Media Statement on the Ten Point Plan”, November 13, 1997, where he stated: “The fact is that the Wik decision pushed the pendulum too far in the Aboriginal direction. The 10 point plan will return the pendulum to the centre.” Blainey used the pendulum metaphor to describe the shift in historical view from a “too favourable” to a “blackarmband” view of Australian history. See Geoffrey Blainey “Drawing Up a Balance Sheet of Our History,” 1993, p. 11.

\textsuperscript{54}This was the main strategy of those defending the Wik decision and native title.
nation. These "toilers" would never be sacrificed to the interests of "ungrateful" members of an "Aboriginal industry" claiming land by birthright rather than by hard work and struggle. Farmers' and pastoralists' efforts in the past and the present in building Australia would be honoured directly through the alterations to the NTA. At the same time, and through such honouring, the Howard Government would strike a blow against the historical revisionists and indigenising settler-nationalists who, they argued, had besmirched the nation. Howard had himself indicated early in his Prime Ministership that he embraced this wider agenda of restoring pride in Australia's past against the "black armband" historians.55 The Wik decision gave him the opportunity to prove his mettle, and to undo some of the "damage" to the nation he and other conservatives felt Keating's Government had done with the passing of the NTA.

John Howard's Ten Point Plan was widely rejected by indigenous groups and indigenous leaders of all political persuasions who saw in it an attempt to effectively extinguish native title on pastoral leases in an underhand fashion. They, and historians like Henry Reynolds, saw it as effecting the biggest land grab in Australian history, completing the process of dispossession begun in 1788.56 Basically the audience that the plan had in mind consisted of the pastoralists, the mining industry and that section of the Australian public concerned with what they saw as governments "giving in to special interest groups", the irony of course being that the pastoralists and miners represent interest groups par excellence. Some within the mainstream of political conservatism urged Howard to be even more rigid in the face of indigenous

55See Mark McKenna "Metaphors of light and darkness: the politics of 'Black armband history,'" 1998.
56Henry Reynolds made this claim repeatedly in newspaper columns, media appearances and at public forums. The social justice commissioner Mr. Mick Dodson, a prominent Aboriginal leader, told a gathering in Melbourne in May, 1997, that the Howard Government was going to give away our land, meaning everyone's land held for the nation by the Crown, to wealthy pastoralists for nothing. More than a Piece of Paper: the right to be counted, (Celebration of the 30th anniversary of the referendum), Koori Student and Liaison Unit, Carlton Melbourne.
demands. In April 1997 the Liberal, National Party and Country Liberal Party presidents of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory issued a joint statement urging Howard to stand firm and not to attempt to reach an agreement with indigenous representatives, casting them as insatiable parasites on the rest of the Australian community. “The history of the past two decades”, they claimed, “proves the Aboriginal industry has an insatiable appetite for this nation’s public lands, its pastoral estates, mineral fields, rivers and sea coasts. . . Cities and towns are also under threat.”

In July 1997 the President of the National Farmers’ Federation, Donald McGauchie, claimed that in opposing the Wik legislation Aborigines were really aiming to gain control of Australian farms rather than access to pastoral leases. “What they want is the land, the power to control that land, or compensation, and that is why their arguments have been so fierce and at times so extreme”, he argued. He made a tentative distinction between Aboriginal individuals and small groups in the outback who might have only been concerned with carrying on their traditional life (through access to pastoral leases), and the main players in the debate at the regional and national level who wanted to gain extensive control over Australian land.

Howard himself gave credence to these views when he appeared on national television in early September 1997 holding up a map of Australia, the bulk of which was shaded brown in order to indicate the 78 percent of the land mass he asserted the indigenous would be able to claim if his Wik amendments did not get through the Senate.

Again, the above characterisations show the centrality of the processes of splitting and projection, and feelings of persecution, to assimilationist settler-nationalism. Indigenous claims on land are not taken at face value, (i.e. as expressing the importance of land, and connection with it, to indigenous identities), but seen as further

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57 See Gervase Greene “Stand firm on Wik Howard urged”, The Age, Monday 21 April 1997. Church leaders, and others, expressed their horror at the use of such tactics.


evidence of the “greed” of “ungrateful” Aborigines, not willing to work for their right to the land like every other Australian. The indigenous are “persecutors” who would “steal” settler inheritance (a projection related to the historical reality of the settler theft of indigenous land). This also expressed the fear of retaliation: they desire to do to us what we have done to them, therefore we deny that we did anything to them in the first place, and accuse them of the crime, or of the desire to commit the crime. Splitting of Aboriginality between the “unrepresentative” leaders (the “Aboriginal industry”) and the amorphous mass allows the projection of Aboriginal insatiability to appear more reasonable, since they don’t seem to be saying that “all” Aborigines have an insatiable appetite for land. For some, openly racist settler Australians, who have less need to appear reasonable in public, such splitting of Aboriginality is replaced by a simple split between hard-working settler Australians, and an indistinguishable mass of insatiable, inherently lazy and backward, Aborigines.

The long publicly traumatic battle over Wik, and the eventual passing of the Native Title Amendment Act, with amendments forced through by the ALP, the Democrats, the Greens, and finally by the independent Senator Brian Harradine, seemed to reveal the commitment to reconciliation on the part of the Howard Government to be somewhat suspect, at least in the eyes of its many indigenous and non-indigenous critics. The highly regarded indigenous Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Pat Dodson, who soon after the election of the Howard Government had pronounced reconciliation to be at the crossroads, and had throughout 1996 and 1997 cast doubt on the Howard Government’s commitment to the process, was very critical of the Government response to Wik and eventually resigned.60 The National Indigenous Working Group on Native Title responding to the Wik decision felt completely shut out of the dialogue, suggesting that the notion of reconciliation between two equally legitimate parties was being replaced by a process whereby one group, the indigenous, was expected to become reconciled to the Howard Government’s

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60Dodson was quoted saying that the Federal Government was “actively pulling apart the delicate threads of reconciliation.” See The Age, editorial, November 6, 1997, p. A14.
readjustment of the “pendulum”. After the government had effectively dismissed indigenous leaders from any further role in negotiations after April 1997, these same indigenous leaders were reduced to the status of by-standers who could only react from the sidelines to the Government’s maneuverings as it attempted to strike a deal with mining and pastoral interest groups, and with rebel forces within the Coalition at both the state and federal levels (the latter including a potential backbench revolt led by Wilson Tuckey who believed that the Wik amendments did not go far enough). It was hardly surprising that members of the Working Group responded angrily when presented with a “deal”, worked out without their consent, threatening in May 1997 to call for world economic boycotts. Howard scolded them for irresponsibility, and warned that they were only alienating themselves from the rest of the community. “It was inevitable after the Wik decision, which went far beyond the expectations of everybody, including the Aboriginal leaders”, he argued, “... that we had to come back from Wik. Now it’s a question of how far you came back from Wik.” His characteristic approach was thus to play down or even to put a lid on expectations, which he seemed to regard, especially when held by the indigenous, as dangerous things.

The Wik amendments, widely perceived within indigenous communities as an example of governments overriding the small victory indigenous peoples had managed to achieve through their direct engagement with the “white man’s law”, seemed to prove yet again that the law, parading as a neutral instrument, was there for the convenience of settler communities. How else were the indigenous and their supporters (i.e. the Defenders of Native Title

61 The National Indigenous Working Group on Native Title commented in a written submission on proposed changes to the NTA that their job had been made difficult “because of the Government’s preference to merely consult about changes to native title rather than to negotiate.” They believed that “indigenous people have a right to negotiate changes to their fundamental legal rights”, a position reiterated by many indigenous leaders. See “Co-Existence—Negotiation and Certainty: Indigenous Position in response to the Wik decision and the Government’s Proposed Amendments to the Native Title Act, 1993”, April 1997, p. 5.

62 See “Wik plan is a fair deal, says Howard”, The Age, May 1, 1997.
groups that sprang up all over Australia) to interpret the Prime Minister's claim that the very decision itself by the High Court had "swung the pendulum too far in favour of the indigenous" and that it was the job of governments to rectify that unfortunate aspect of the law? Or the exclusion of the indigenous implied in Howard's refusal to adjust in any substantial way the provisions of his Ten Point Plan because, as he frequently asserted, he had made a "covenant" with state governments, miners and pastoralists to carry it through unmodified?63 How were they to interpret the Government's dismissive reaction to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination when it criticised the Wik amendments and suggested that these might be in breach of international commitments in the area of race relations?

One thing that became evident as the debate on Wik unfolded was the difficulty for the Coalition of enunciating, in any convincing way, a concept of reconciliation from its predominantly fight/flight approach to indigenous questions. Bion's understanding of the basic assumptions as predominantly unconscious perhaps helps explain the anger and bewilderment displayed by Coalition politicians, and in particular Prime Minister Howard, when accused, repeatedly and almost unanimously by the indigenous with whom they sought reconciliation, that they were destroying the reconciliation process. The Howard Government reaffirmed time and again its commitment to reconciliation even when directly engaged in the process of diminishing the rights of the indigenous.64 In the middle of the Wik crisis the official national report on the "stolen generations" Bringing Them Home was released. It comprehensively dealt with the long

63See for example Laura Tingle and Claire Miller "Senator Scutles Wik Plan", The Age, December 3, 1997, where it was reported that, when facing National Party MPs "outraged about amendments already agreed to by the Senate, Mr. Howard told the coalition joint party room that the Government had entered into a 'covenant' with state governments, pastoralists and miners on Wik and could not now retreat."

64Howard did this in his televised "Address to the Nation on the Wik amendments", November 30, 1997. See the edited text of this in The Age, December 1, 1997. Howard reiterated this commitment in his election victory speech in 1998.
period of Federal and state policies that resulted in the taking of indigenous children from their parents, and through the testimony of hundreds of indigenous witnesses, gave a strong indication of the devastating consequences of those policies, including maltreatment in the foster homes set up to take “half-caste” children. The Report made a number of allegations, including a carefully explained accusation that previous governments were guilty of acts of genocide in accordance with the accepted United Nations explanation of the concept as spelt out in its \textit{Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide}.\footnote{See \textit{Bringing Them Home}, Part 4.} Among the recommendations was a request from indigenous people for governments to apologise to indigenous peoples for past policies and associated abuses, a recommendation of compensation for the living victims of those policies, and a recommendation that the Government organise a national “Sorry Day” in order to atone for past actions and to recognise indigenous suffering. The refusal by the Howard Government to respond to these specific recommendations became symbolic of, and confirmed for many indigenous peoples, the breakdown of relations between the federal Government and the indigenous since the election of the Coalition.

While John Howard made a form of personal apology at the Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne in 1997, he categorically refused on a number of occasions to apologise on behalf of the nation, in his capacity as Prime Minister, despite repeated requests from indigenous leaders and prominent non-indigenous leaders and public figures. In a response characteristic of the Coalition’s established position on the meaning of the \textit{Bringing Them Home} report Howard was quoted as saying: “We did . . . generations ago, treat our indigenous people appallingly and much remains to be done to achieve a complete reconciliation between various sections of the Australian community.”\footnote{See John Short, Colleen Egan and John Ellicott “$56m Aboriginal health plan expected to overshadow talks”, \textit{The Australian}, December 12 1997.} The use of the qualifying “generations ago” flew in the face of the Report’s documentation of very recent serious human rights abuses. In parliament Howard’s response involved the same obfuscation, seeming to recognise the depth of abuses one moment then qualifying the character of those
abuses the next—a flight from the meaning of national guilt or shame. Even Howard's behaviour at the Reconciliation Convention revealed, despite his very real attempt in the speech to display sympathy in the tone required by the solemnity of the occasion, his fight/flight attitude. The offence to his audience was less in the actual contents of his speech than in his hectoring delivery, and particularly his angry thumping of the podium—just as if he were attacking the opposition in parliament. His style was completely inappropriate to the occasion.

Various reasons were given by Government representatives for refusing to apologise nationally. These included: the argument that it might lead to compensation; that it was not the responsibility of the government of the day to apologise for the actions of past governments, and nor was it the responsibility of present generations to feel guilt or to say sorry for the actions of past generations; that the actions of past generations were possibly appropriate, and definitely legal, in accordance with previous beliefs, mores and laws; that past generations had acted with good intentions in taking children away, and that, as Senator Herron (the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs) and other Coalition politicians argued, many Aborigines of today, including several prominent Aborigines, were beneficiaries of those past policies; and that the government could not apologise on behalf of the 40% of the population not born here who, having come to Australia in the last ten or fifteen years, could have had no influence on these policies.

Despite these rationalisations, many state parliaments, both Labor and conservative-led, found their way to incorporate apologies via motions and resolutions, seemingly giving the lie to the Howard Government's reasoning. The behaviour in the

67 See reports of Herron's comments in The Weekend Australian, October 5-6 1996, pp. 1, 3; "Herron remark draws criticism", The Age, October 7 1996, A2.
68 See James Woodford "Why PM won't say Australia is sorry", Sydney Morning Herald, December 12, 1997.
69 The parliaments of the Australian Capital Territory, Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, and Western Australia all made formal apologies to the stolen generations around that time, while the Northern Territory and Queensland parliaments did not.
parliament of Howard’s Labor counterpart Kim Beazley was a stark contrast to Howard’s defensive response. Responding to the *Bringing Them Home* report Beazley openly wept as he read stories of the indigenous who had been stolen from their parents. Howard chose not to take part in the debate, leaving the main points to be presented by Peter Reith; left the Chamber as the Opposition began to read out some of the terrible stories from the Report;\textsuperscript{70} and then, as in the succeeding months, refused all requests to pass a resolution apologising for past government actions.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion—The Politics of Reconciliation

As I have shown in the second half of this thesis, there has been, since the 1960s, a growing movement for achieving some form of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. The Aboriginal land rights movement from the mid 1960s; the government commitments from the early 1970s to rectify historic wrongs and to achieve justice for indigenous peoples; the treaty arguments that gained momentum in the 1980s; all had as part of their aims the resolution of long-standing grievances. At the same time there were movements of resistance, even angry repudiations of Aboriginal grievances and claims. At the end of the 1980s Prime Minister Hawke initiated discussions with the federal Opposition to begin an official process of reconciliation.¹ Commissioner Elliott Johnston QC, in the final National Report from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, strongly endorsed the efforts to establish a governmental process of Reconciliation then underway,² and called on politicians to give it their bipartisan support. The process of reconciliation, he argued, was central to ameliorating the terrible conditions of life, and the low levels of morale in indigenous communities, that had been emphasised throughout the years that the Royal Commission sat.³

The official reconciliation process began with the unanimous passing of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991, which set up the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (hereafter CAR) and directed it to achieve reconciliation by 2001, the centenary of federation. The Council consists of 12 Aboriginal, 2 Torres Strait Islander and 11 non-Aboriginal members. Among the ten functions

¹See Frank Brennan, “From Terra Nullius to Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal Rights”, 1992, pp. 35-7 & passim.
²The Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Robert Tickner, had released a draft document on reconciliation.
of the CAR was a carefully framed directive concerning a "formal
document or formal documents of reconciliation", that might emerge
after consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
communities and the wider Australian community.\(^4\)

The CAR's approach to reconciliation is framed by indigenising
settler-nationalism. This can be seen from an examination of many
of its issue papers and official statements. The CAR's adopted vision
statement speaks of a "united Australia which respects this land of
ours, values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and
provides justice and equity to all."\(^5\) Social justice for indigenous
people is framed by a nationalist discourse within which indigenous
people are seen to be "central and integral to the cultural fabric" of
the Australian nation.\(^6\) The CAR was set up under a Labor
government openly committed to indigenising settler-nationalism
with the acquiescence of an Opposition that was in many respects
committed to assimilationist settler-nationalism. This apparent
anomaly can be explained by the fact that the carefully worded
legislation, tailored to meet Coalition concerns such as its opposition
to use of the word "treaty", though it steered the CAR in certain
directions did not prevent it from adopting an indigenising
discourse that many in the Coalition opposed. The concept of
reconciliation was itself vague enough to contain many competing
views that would, only through the process itself, come into open
conflict. This conflict intensified after the election of a federal
Coalition Government politically opposed to many of the sentiments
and statements that the CAR has represented and produced.

Reconciliation addresses a deeply felt need on the part of many
non-indigenous people to redress the grievous wrongs committed
against the indigenous, and to raise the latter's symbolic and
material status as members of the Australian community. Its
educational role has been highlighted by supporters as a positive
step towards cultivating broader community sympathy for the
indigenous plight, a better understanding of an often tumultuous
history, acceptance of the need to protect and enhance indigenous
cultural heritage, and an ongoing commitment to addressing

indigenous disadvantage. It is an inclusive nationalist discourse that aims to give effect to a politics of cultural recognition and respect for indigenous peoples. At the same time, it has been criticised by some indigenous writers for, at least potentially, deflecting attention and energies from what they regard as the more pressing issues of a treaty, land rights, indigenous self-determination and continuing sovereignty.\(^7\) Because it is a government initiative, one writer argued in the early 1990s, the government would not let it travel down paths it did not want it to. For example, the “document of reconciliation” proposal carefully avoids any notion of distinct political communities reaching an agreement. Instead, it seems to suggest that such a document will only be recommended if it is seen to benefit the “community as a whole.” It is thus a consultation rather than a negotiated settlement. There is nothing within the Act binding anyone to produce such a document. The election of a less favourable government, that same writer prophetically argued, might lead to its dissipation as a process.\(^8\)

The concept of an overarching nation beneath which \textit{less than national} indigenous and non-indigenous identities flourish is articulated by CAR discourse even as it, through publications or speeches by its representatives, makes occasional reference to indigenous “nations”. It is assumed by such discourse that an Australian nation, properly conceived (or “matured”, to adopt the language of many advocates, both indigenous and non-indigenous) can accommodate differences and all aspirations. The limits of the national form, as liberal-democratic artefact, in accommodating these differences and aspirations are rarely interrogated.

One force mitigating against such questioning within the CAR and the popular movement it purports to head is the very settler-nationalist underpinning of the reconciliation process. Ideas and feelings about the nation, national belonging, and reconciliation vary, but what “Aboriginal Reconciliation” means for many of its


non-indigenous supporters is the opportunity to free the nation of the guilt or shame associated with its foundation, and with its policies towards the indigenous for a large part of its history. The brutality of that foundation, and of many of those policies, has been thoroughly brought home since the rise of revisionist histories in the 1960s, and through the release of powerful official documents such as the reports from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and more recently the Report from the Social Justice and Equal Opportunities Commission into the “stolen generations”, *Bringing Them Home*. Reconciliation is, at least in part, a process aimed at restoring what has become for some non-indigenous people a tarnished national identity. The possible benefits for the indigenous relate to the way that justice and reparation for past wrongs are seen as inextricably bound up with freeing the nation of the “legacy of unutterable shame” (to quote the High Court Judges Deane and Gaudrun in the slightly different context of their comments on *terra nullius* in their ruling in Mabo No. 2). In this spirit, the reconciliation movement has sought to encourage and promote a sense of general good will towards indigenous individuals and communities. By the same token, for those in the settler community who maintain that the notion of tarnished national identity is a fiction of the “guilt-ridden” left-liberal imagination, reconciliation is either dismissed, is conceived simply as a process aimed at bringing the indigenous into line with all other Australians in terms of health, education, jobs, and housing, or is seen as a way of making the indigenous “transcend” the past and get on with being responsible, autonomous Australians.9 For some it is really a one-way process—the indigenous need to become reconciled to Australian society. The former Chief Justice of the High Court, Sir Harry Gibbs, even argued that the critique of colonialism engaged in by the indigenous and their supporters was harmful of the reconciliation process:

9The prominent critic of Aboriginal affairs Ron Brunton while supporting the concept of a reconciliation process, is very critical of the approach of the Council, and incorporates a version of these views in his critique. See R. Brunton, “Counter-productive Council”, 1996, pp. 24-5.
It is understandable that the Aboriginal peoples should be embittered by what occurred, although it is difficult to see how reconciliation is advanced by constant reiteration of the evils of the society with which one seeks to be reconciled.\textsuperscript{10}

Belonging to a nation means belonging to an ethical or moral community. David Miller has argued that the “duties we owe to our fellow-nationals are different from, and more extensive than, the duties we owe to human beings as such.” This is not to say that members of national communities have no ethical obligations to outsiders, but that these are of a different quality. National boundaries represent important limits to communities of ethical closure. Thus “there is no objection in principle to institutional schemes that are designed to deliver benefits exclusively to those who fall within the same boundaries as ourselves.”\textsuperscript{11} For this reason, the inclusiveness evident in the Australian governmental response to the indigenous since the end of the Second World War has been an important source of gain for the indigenous. The increasing consensus on their status as legitimate members of the nation, emphasised in the discourse of equal citizenship that resulted in incremental achievement of rights in the second half of the twentieth century, has been a momentous change. From a position of exclusion from the white nation, the indigenous have come to occupy a special and unique place within the nation.

Insofar as the indigenous have been able to exercise power in the reconciliation process, once it got underway, that power has rested on the moral claim they can make regarding the settler nation, and the spiritual claim that they make over the land. In general they lack other key sources of social power. As a direct result of colonisation, they are the poorest, least healthy, most disadvantaged group in Australian society. The important thing that distinguishes this moral and spiritual power from the other sources


\textsuperscript{11}See David Miller “In Defence of Nationality”, 1993. Quotes are from p. 5. Yael Tamir argues a similar case at greater length, in her \textit{Liberal Nationalism}, 1993, passim, but especially ch. 5.
of power is its dependence upon the sensibilities of settler Australians. These sensibilities can be volatile, as events in the mid to late 1990s such as the rise of Pauline Hanson's right wing nationalist movement and the rural revolt against native title indicated. To a large extent non-indigenous sensibilities dictate the parameters of the moral discourse on reconciliation.

Early indigenous leaders like Pearl Gibbs, Doug Nichols, William Cooper, and William Ferguson in the 1930s and 1940s, and contemporary leaders such as Pat and Mick Dodson, Lowitja O'Donoghue, Noel Pearson, CAR Chairwoman Evelyn Scott and ATSIC Chairman Gatjil Djerrkura, seem to have recognised these political limitations. In the face of, at times, extreme resistance, in the past and in the present, these leaders have managed to cultivate non-indigenous support for greater civil rights for indigenous peoples, by making claims upon an Australian nation to which they also claimed to belong, at times speaking in the language of national maturity and development. In other words, in their political response and strategies one can perceive an apparent recognition of the way that the boundaries of moral community have tended to coincide with those of national community; those inside the nation could expect to be treated differently to those who stood outside.

I am not suggesting that such a stance was or is simply strategic. I make no claim to know what these leaders of the past thought or felt, or those of the present think or feel, about their belonging to an Australian nation. At the same time clearly these leaders and others speak and have spoken from a more ambivalent position both inside and outside the nation, as Australians and indigenous people, thus reflecting the complex history of nation formation, including long periods of exclusion of the indigenous, and, perhaps more importantly, the continuous (and distinct from settler) histories of indigenous communities on the Australian continent and islands. Other Aboriginal leaders, such as Michael Mansell of the Aboriginal Provisional Government, the NSW head of the Aboriginal Legal Service Paul Coe, and indigenous representatives of government created organisations like the National Aboriginal Conference (NAC) in the early 1980s, have

12See for example the NAC's demands on the settler nation as set out in their 1982 document "Makarrata: Preliminary Findings of Makarrata Research."
spoken from a position outside the nation, *only* as indigenous peoples to whom the settler nation owes historical justice.

The inclusiveness implied in much government action in the post-Second World War period, and specifically within the movement for reconciliation has, nevertheless, its other side. The desire for joining, the emphasis on being one people, mitigates against those indigenous interests that rely exactly on the point of distinction between indigenous and non-indigenous remaining alive. Many settler-Australians, otherwise well-disposed towards finding ways of improving the conditions under which indigenous people live, baulk at the idea of separate rights—like distinct forms of Aboriginal land rights only available to indigenous people. For this is seen to undermine the fundamental principle of equality within the one democratic polity of citizens.

Jacqueline Rose, reflecting on a different political situation, asked whether justice could ever really be shared by distinct political communities, or whether one community could ever speak truly of justice for another. She examined the Israeli and Palestinian peace process for the fantasies and notions of justice inscribed in it, and highlighted the peace slogan “just, lasting, comprehensive” which, in her eyes, entailed the danger of incorporation, as it is understood in some psychoanalytic readings:

... you incorporate something by devouring it; unlike introjection, where you take someone in as part of yourself but recognise them as separate, still let them be.

She warned of the danger that such forms of total and final justice “instead of leaving the world standing, would simply swallow and abolish all differences, wipe out all parties to the deal.”¹³ The governmental discourse of reconciliation speaks in the language of a justice which would be the last word, a final resolution of a long standing antagonism. But this fantasy of final and total justice threatens to eliminate any distinction between settler and indigenous. Through such justice settlers might complete their project of fusing nation with soil, but at the expense of the indigenous and their specific rights. In much of the Reconciliation

reprinted in Wright *We Call for a Treaty*, pp. 324-32.

rhetoric it is clear that there is a desire to overcome these differences between settler and indigenous communities. In this respect, 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. In this sense, as a form of state practice, reconciliation can be seen as serving an important function of ideological containment of “dangerous” aspirations and claims.

The contemporary reference to indigenous peoples as the first Australians, as if the Australian nation preceded European invasion—immigrant peoples moving into the nation as they moved into the continent—reveals the emotional and cognitive potency of the national form, and the idealised belief that the nation has existed from time immemorial. But, as I emphasised in my introduction, the “immemorial past” of a transplanted nation is a complicated negotiation. The “sharing” of indigenous culture by the nation-state is guided by self-interest, and by a reparative gesture conditioned by the central dilemma of settler-nationalism. The very premise of this “sharing” is nevertheless a source of disturbing ambivalence for the non-indigenous. In the CAR Key Issue Paper *Sharing History* it is claimed that:

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.\textsuperscript{14}

While the manifest discourse in this passage is about "sharing", the latent emphasis is envy—an envy of the history of other nations or peoples including Australia's indigenous peoples. This is an important undercurrent of reconciliation discourse, as it is of all forms of settler-nationalism. As a strategy for effecting reconciliation it is also flawed. Firstly, it sets out to achieve what to many people would seem an artificial joining of distinct histories—unlike Renan's notion of the centrality of \textit{forgetting} for peoples forming a unified nationhood, here is a call for \textit{remembering} and \textit{fusing} with other peoples' histories. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it calls forth a paranoid response from at least some non-indigenous people it seeks to embrace. Envy is inherently spoiling, or destructive.\textsuperscript{15} For those already swayed by reconciliation rhetoric destructiveness is held in abeyance by the argument that non-indigenous Australians can share equally in the envied indigenous connection with the land. By grafting Aboriginality onto a settler identity that seems too "light", too lacking in historical depth and continuity with the territory it wants to fuse itself with, such an identity would be indigenised. The fact that indigenous leaders like Patrick Dodson have used the supposed "spiritual hollowness" at the core of settler society in order to stress the need for that society to fully embrace and respect indigenous culture, traditions and spiritual connection with the land, indicates that calls for "sharing" of culture and land do not simply come from settlers.\textsuperscript{16}

The undercurrent of envy that Dodson appeals to, however, is a volatile emotion. Suggesting that the settler nation is spiritually

\textsuperscript{14}CAR, \textit{Sharing History}, 1994, p. 28.

\textsuperscript{15}For a psychoanalytic explanation of envy and its uses in political life, see A.F. Davies, \textit{Skills, Outlooks and Passions}, 1980, pp. 346-60.

\textsuperscript{16}See Patrick Dodson "Reconciliation at the Crossroads," 1996. In this address Dodson said:

If we don't find a way to agree to provide adequate support for the cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples; to provide support for the sustenance of indigenous languages law and culture, we will have a nation without a spiritual base. A hollow society.
lacking can strike a raw nerve, resulting in angry rejection and
derision. There are several settler responses apart from the effort to
share with the indigenous their long-standing connection with the
land. One is to repress envious feelings by establishing an
equivalence between settler and indigenous connections with land.
Another is to deny the continuing Aboriginal connection with land,
or even to deny that such a connection ever really existed.17

The fears that underlie the desire to be one people—fears that a
given territory can not abide many different peoples who do not
share the same national commitment, without violent conflict—have
a long history among settlers. As I argued in chapter 2, at the very
moment of its political formation as a nation, political leaders looked
askance at places such as the United States of America and South
Africa, and decided that the same race problems would never find a
place in Australia. Historically, Australian settler-nationalism
articulated its desire for its nation against a vision of dystopia. The
conservative defenders of the old Australia, like Geoffrey Blainey,
make explicit appeal to these fears. Pauline Hanson in many of her
speeches and press releases has emphasised the threat of division,
of enemies within and conspiratorial forces that threaten to destroy
her idealised nation. During the speech launching her One Nation
Party, Hanson highlighted these fears, and posed an ideal nation—
that she claimed had historically existed but was being dismantled—
as the best defence against them:

17During the 1993 parliamentary debate on native title legislation, Tim
Fischer, in speaking of his core constituency of farmers, made use of the first
of these strategies, arguing that farmers and their families had an attachment
to their land every bit as spiritual and deep as that of Aborigines. “They
consider themselves custodians of the land, not merely investors in the land”,
he argued. CPD, HR, November 23, 1993, p. 3426. For the second strategy one
might consider the whole ideological edifice, given expression in many ways,
which places Aboriginality in a past era which effectively ended with
European colonisation. From that point onwards, the spiritual connection
with land becomes meaningless. The doctrine of terra nullius was a denial of
real Aboriginal connection with land, and can be taken as such to represent
the third strategy.
Government policies have given us different classifications for Australians. We now have Aboriginal Australians, and Indonesian Australians and other ethnic minorities. We want everyone to think of themselves simply as Australians, and to be Australians. If you came here for a better life then live that better life with us. Be with us, be one of us, be a part of One Nation, not one of the many parts of a divided nation. There is no need to forget where you came from, but above all, remember where you are. Surely most people who have come to Australia have come for a better life. Do they want our country to become like the place they left? Do you? What of your dream for Australia? Do you want it to be like another place? Indonesia perhaps? Cambodia or Vietnam? How about Iran or Iraq or maybe Lebanon? Are there so many good things about these places that you would want Australia to be like them? Do you want race riots, religious fanaticism, gang and drug wars? Do you want civil war?18

She has been, as might be expected, a trenchant critic of reconciliation—even if on occasion she claimed to be accepting of the government process in principle19—arguing that the settler nation had nothing to be sorry for, and that the indigenous should in fact be grateful to it for having drawn it out of a “degraded” form of life.

And yet the supporters of a multicultural or diverse Australia, driven by the desire for community and connection more than by fears of disintegration, speak in a similar nationalist language that, at times, calls upon the indigenous to forsake their stronger claim to self-determination, and separate identity, and to embrace a national identity whose symbols all will share. The Governor-General

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18Pauline Hanson, Speech Launching Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party, April 1997.
19See for example her speech on the motion passed in parliament against racism and in support of reconciliation, where she claimed that she agreed with the section stating that the House “Reaffirms its commitment to the process of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in the context of redressing their profound social and economic disadvantage.” The whole tone of the speech was full of anger and resentment. CPD, HR, October 31, 1996, p. 6341.
William Deane, a strong advocate of justice for the indigenous, nevertheless saw the need, as exemplified by his message read at National Reconciliation Week 1996, for indigenous peoples to accept certain “realities”:

It is also important to remember that reconciliation is a two-way process. For their part, the Aboriginal peoples must recognise and accept that we now all constitute one Australian people, one Australian nation. Equally, other Australians must recognise and accept that the effects of past spiritual degradation cannot be overcome by money alone. Unless all the Australian people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, recognise and accept these fundamental truths, our nation as a whole will remain diminished.\textsuperscript{20}

The one people discourse in Australia dates back to pre-federation days: Barton's famous phrase “a nation for a continent, a continent for a nation” still resonates with settler-nationalists today. As an ideological sign “one people” becomes a battleground of competing claims shared by the most potent advocates of reconciliation and by its adversaries. For those who prefer the older assimilationist doctrines “one people” means an homogeneous national people sharing the same culture, the same desires and aspirations, the same lifestyle, and exactly the same rights. The non-indigenous advocates of Reconciliation, like William Deane, Frank Brennan, Paul Keating and a myriad others, do not mean this. Rather, they emphasise the need to recognise difference and to accept diversity. But in what sense is it meaningful to say, then, that indigenous peoples must recognise that they also form part of one Australian people, one Australian nation? What is contained in such a demand, why must it be stressed, and who is it addressing?

The official reconciliation discourse has difficulty accommodating or dealing with those indigenous people who position themselves symbolically outside the Australian nation.\textsuperscript{21} By


\textsuperscript{21}By, for example, proclaiming the continuous sovereignty of the Aboriginal nation or nations, or through acts of resistance, cultural defiance, and rejection of the settler nation.
implicitly or explicitly asserting continued sovereignty they step outside and potentially undermine the discourse that legitimises the Australian nation as the sole occupant of the Australian territory. Consequently, their voice is rarely heard among the voices preaching reconciliation, as they have not committed themselves to the reconciliation bargain\textsuperscript{22}—the drawing together of indigenous and non-indigenous communities under the umbrella of one, albeit culturally diverse, nation.

To even suggest that more than one national community exists in the Australian territory, if the claims of some Australian nationalists were to be believed, is to court communal suicide, even to commit treason. Are indigenous communities nations? Not, perhaps, according to the concept of nation as it emerged in Europe, and as it is conceived by many social scientists. But the claim to nationhood is also a political claim, not simply an intellectual argument concerned with conceptual niceties. Indigenous people have claimed that they belonged to sovereign nations at the time of invasion, and that they belong to a unified Aboriginal nation today.\textsuperscript{23} Conservative critics of self-determination for indigenous communities implicitly concede that the latter are at least potential nations when they refer to the danger of creating “nations within nations”. They have thus used the potential “nationness” of Aboriginal communities to deny those communities indigenous rights. But does the question of nationhood really capture what is unique and significant about relations between settler and indigenous communities anyway?

Perhaps we should discard the term “nation” for a moment—despite its potency—and use instead political community. In this respect the indigenous need to be clearly distinguished from the different ethnic groups that make up the settler nation. This point needs to be emphasised, as one of the more common and persistent conservative critiques of any notion of indigenous rights is based on


\textsuperscript{23}See for example Loretta Kelly, “Reconciliation and the Implications for a Sovereign Aboriginal Nation”, 1993, p. 11. Noel Pearson argues against this position. See his essay “Reconciliation, To Be or Not to Be—Separate Aboriginal Nationhood or Aboriginal Self-Determination and Self-Government Within the Australian Nation?” 1993.
the claim that a multi-ethnic nation will not be able to stem the tide of other claims if these are granted and accepted as legitimate. The crucial question is, did indigenous communities consent at any time to become members of the settler nation-state? If the answer is “no”, as I think it is (in the absence of any proof otherwise), then their situation is fundamentally different to that of immigrants who voluntarily consented to become part of the political community of Australia. The absence of treaties spelling out exactly what the relationship is does not resolve the issue. Rather, it simply reflects the refusal of British and Australian governments to consider indigenous communities as distinct political entities. Official Reconciliation does not adequately address this distinction either. Potential and actual conflicts of aspiration centre on a struggle over what constitutes equality and justice for all. The idea of a unitary national people whose sovereignty is vested in its governments and ultimately in the Crown is potentially at odds with the notion of separate rights for the indigenous. Those opposing such rights can mount a strong nationalist argument, calling upon the notion of “one undivided people,” according to which any form of separate treatment of the indigenous implies a splitting of the national fabric. Those supporting indigenous rights from within a nationalist discourse must compete on the same ground, pointing out that they also support equality for all and an undivided nation, and must convince the doubters that travelling along their path of acceptance of diversity will not lead to national fragmentation. This is exactly what many advocates of reconciliation have attempted to do, but in continuing to speak in the language of nationalism—and specifically of “one nation”—these advocates undermine the very basis from

24John R. Danley makes exactly this point, citing the United States of America as his example, in his essay “Liberalism, Aboriginal Rights and Cultural Minorities”, 1991, p. 185. Jane Robbins, in “Aborigines, Rights and Reconciliation”, 1995, suggested that Danley’s argument might apply in the Australian context, but raised questions about its applicability given the lack of treaties, and her own assumption that while some Indian tribes in America fitted the criteria of “nations”, Australia’s indigenous communities did not. As I indicate above, the lack of treaties is not the issue. Nor do I see the relevance for indigenous rights of claims about whether peoples were nations or not at the time of invasion.
which the indigenous can pursue their claim for self-determination. That basis is the legitimacy of the separate political status of the indigenous community vis-a-vis the colonial (or settler) state.

The nation as community, no matter how non-homogenising of its peoples it attempts to be, can not contain or address all indigenous aspirations. The questions and issues, including those of sovereignty, self-determination and self-government, and territorial, cultural and land rights, in their complexity and difficulty outstrip the capacity of the nation to absorb and contain them. The dilemmas of identity and negotiation in Australia share a level of commonality with relations between nation-states and indigenous peoples in other areas of the world.25 The nation-state as model for community is based on the notion of indivisible sovereignty and uniform political rights for all citizens. The underpinning liberal principles by-pass notions of group rights, (typically accepting only weak notions of cultural pluralism), to recognise the legitimacy of individual rights that it is the duty of the state to ultimately ensure and protect.26 Individuals rather than groups thus have a rights-based relationship directly with the state. And yet, many successful indigenous claims to self-determination in various states since the 1960s have involved a major concession from the governments of those states. This concession has resulted in a reformulation of the democratic state in which, as Guntrum Werther has argued, “modern aboriginal polities exist based upon a non-liberal idea of political legitimacy (aboriginal status) and in which a dual construction of individual political rights is acknowledged.”27 This is, as Werther is at pains to point out, an unstable situation in which liberal assumptions about the nature of the democratic state are undermined, but often in an unacknowledged way, as states attempt to grapple with their historical situation, and especially with the existence of an international moral, legal and political framework that accepts the

25 For a useful discussion of some of these issues see Noel Dyck (ed.), Indigenous Peoples and the Nation-State, 1985.
legitimacy of the sovereignty and political rights of “indigenous nations”. These states have found themselves, to a certain extent, unable to withstand the force of the better argument mounted by indigenous peoples—especially where the indigenous can marshal significant international support—since states themselves rely upon a claim of legitimacy and legal consistency.28 Despite the claim to uniformity under modern constitutions, many settler states have found that their own common law provides for forms of recognition of property and other rights for the indigenous which many believed, wrongly, had disappeared. This does not prevent, however, the rise of forces of backlash within those states, as the reality of indigenous demands bites home, most potently wherever economic issues that affect the majority population are shown to be involved. And, always competing against the quest for legitimacy and legal consistency, are certain nation-state policy aims. We can expect, Werther argues, for the latter to ultimately predominate.29

John Morton has recently suggested that indigenous and non-indigenous Australians might draw sustenance from what he calls the “redemptive” aspects of reconciliation. The indigenous can help to symbolically redeem the settler nation, and through this process improve their own status. He claims that indigenous actors have much to gain, and much positive power to assert, through their


29 Guntrum F.A. Werther, Self-Determination in Western Democracies, 1992, p. 42. For an excellent analysis of the efforts of modern constitutionalism to grapple with indigenous and other claims on the democratic state, see James Tully, Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity, 1995. See especially ch. 4, where he discusses the “hidden constitutions of contemporary societies” that, in a post-imperial age, produce constitutional accommodations of cultural diversity.
engagement with the symbolic structures of reconciliation. Radical disengagement from these processes, he believes, would only serve to undermine indigenous people's recently acquired symbolic power.

Morton argues that this symbolic power can only be sustained by indigenous people to the extent that they pursue rights and status within the Australian nation. The Crown, he argues, retains sovereignty over Australia and will do so unless there is a violent insurrection to displace it. This is unlikely to come from Aboriginal quarters. Thus Aboriginal law, and rights, now depend fundamentally upon Crown law. Given this reality, he points out that the indigenous might be wise, in their efforts to secure a better deal, to continue to engage in an act of "reciprocal exchange" of culture and history with the rest of Australia. He emphasises the notion of exchange in cultural development, in the gradual emergence of one Australian community. Thus colonisation, appropriation and assimilation can be considered in different, more benign, terms:

If appropriation is too often a dirty word, assimilation and colonisation are even grubbier. In each case, lexical defilement obscures possible shades of meaning. To appropriate something merely means to take it unto oneself and devote it to a special purpose; to assimilate is to liken and absorb something into oneself; to colonise is to occupy and settle new terrain. Making these processes mutual is what we should be looking towards and creating in the nation's future.30

In defending this claim, Morton argues against the monolithic notion of the settler nation as colonial-imperialist artefact. Though appropriations of Aboriginality serve the state, that state can be seen to embrace everyone:

...in spite of its own rhetoric, the Australian state is no more a timeless monster feeding on its 1788 victory celebrations than is Australia's Aboriginal constituency destined to forever continue some kind of mystical walkabout at the 'dawn of time.' The state is, in fact, an organised political community

with government recognised by the people. As such, it must be responsive to the wishes, needs and will of the people, and not always in such a way as to coerce, repress and call forth resistance.

The state can be transformed from within to represent all peoples in the Australian territory, to redress the injustices of the past, and to transcend its own imperialist heritage vis a vis indigenous peoples. It could become a truly post-colonial state.\textsuperscript{31}

In fact this is the claim which often emerges from, or is implicit in, the reports and issue papers emanating from the CAR. The point about potential impotence, as a result of disengagement from the sharing of culture and symbolism through reconciliation within a legitimate nation-state owned by everyone, is a powerful one. A similar point was made a few years ago by Henry Reynolds in a radio debate with Paul Coe and Michael Mansell. Reynolds argued that Aborigines tread a dangerous path when they assert sovereignty as a moral right, since they risked losing their moral legitimacy in the eyes of settler communities.\textsuperscript{32}

These political realities should not lead, on the other hand, to an uncritical embrace of official reconciliation rhetoric. Real differences between indigenous and non-indigenous political communities continue to exist, and real points of fracture will continue to enliven relations between indigenous and non-indigenous. Redemption for the non-indigenous through Reconciliation involves as its other side various degrees of coercion of indigenous peoples. Not the least of these might be characterised as the coercion of Aboriginal identities (often) authorised and canonised by a state which, afterall, has hardly been benevolent or innocent in its motives when constructing publicly digestible Aboriginalities in the past.\textsuperscript{33} For

\textsuperscript{31}“Aboriginality, Mabo and the Republic,” p. 133. Patrick Wolfe takes the opposite view, pointing to the need to analyse the continuities that underpin state practice in relation to Aborigines. See “Nation and MiscegeNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” 1994, passim.
\textsuperscript{32}The debate was in May 1987, and is discussed in Tim Rowse, \textit{After Mabo}, 1993, pp. 23-4.
\textsuperscript{33}For a critique of state constructions of “public Aboriginality” see Jeremy Beckett, “The past in the Present; the present in the past: constructing a
example, to what extent do images of the timelessness of the Aboriginal “dreamtime”, or the “primordiality” of the ancient Aboriginal peoples and land continue to serve the ideological function of justification for the replacement of Aboriginal societies by a more “progressive”, modern culture and society? And to what extent do such authorisations confere Aboriginality to an aesthetic or spiritual realm that has little to do with the reality of contemporary Aboriginal identities? There is no guarantee that the symbolic embracing of Aboriginality by the nation-state will translate into any improvement of the social, economic and political position of contemporary Aborigines. Such an “Aboriginality” might serve to disenfranchise most indigenous people, just as the Native Title Act, in its incorporation of Aboriginality as “traditional”, cancelled out the land rights of 95% of the indigenous.

Epilogue: Mourning, Melancholia and Reconciliation

Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of


34 A number of authors have made similar points. Jeremy Beckett has referred to the way that governments have in their constructions of public Aboriginality, made most Aborigines “inauthentic”. See Jeremy Beckett, “The past in the Present; the present in the past: constructing a national Aboriginality”, p. 194. See also Patrick Wolfe “Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” 1994, pp. 110-18.

35 See Andrew Lattas “Aborigines and Contemporary Australian Nationalism: Primordiality and the Cultural Politics of Otherness.”

36 This was the complaint reiterated by indigenous representatives and in submissions to the senate committee considering the Native Title Bill in 1993. Patrick Wolfe argues that the Native Title Act is an act of disenfranchisement, a “formula for extinguishment” of Aboriginal rights, “Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era,” 1994, pp. 122-3.
one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal and so on. (Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia”)

If it is the case that reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Australia calls for a process of the mourning of an older idea of the nation, then we can be assured that there will be considerable pain and even resistance. In bringing this thesis to a close I return to a theme that I first raised in the introduction, referring to comments Jean-François Lyotard had made in an essay dealing with the decline of universalist narratives in the west. In that essay Lyotard refers to the processes of mourning and melancholy involved in the west’s response to the breakdown of its “grand narrative” of civilisation and enlightenment. Those belonging to the colonising west, he argues, must face the loss of their image of themselves as enlightened and of their society as emancipated, standing at the forefront of a universal history of humanity. People of the west must mourn the Enlightenment’s idea of “universal humanity”, but also that view of themselves as subject of a process aimed at “humanity’s” emancipation and “completion” as a community. Thus they must review their notions of what they are in a very fundamental sense. Freud characterised mourning as a form of working through, a long process involving the gradual dissolution of a complex of libidinous ties to the lost object. But there can be other responses to loss, such as absolute denial, or pathological mourning (melancholia), in which the self is hated and denigrated. Lyotard points to a form of tyranny arising out of secondary narcissism: the other who would not enter the modern project is then completely forsaken in a narcissistic retreat into a singularity exercising a will to power over others. The emancipation of “universal humanity” has lost currency, thus our justice does not extend to them.

Allowing indigenous peoples to remain outside the nation (which they may perceive as fundamentally a settler-nation) if they so choose, without thus forsaking their moral claim or their claim to justice from the non-indigenous, might be one response arising out

38 Freud “Mourning and Melancholia.”
of the mourning of the old idea of nation. But there have been other responses. Freud explained in psychic terms why periods of melancholia could alternate with periods of intense mania, a refusal to admit the suffering involved in giving up an object, a wild hope, a narcissistic assertion of self. The details of this process need not detain us here. Suffice to say that one can see evidence of such mania in the recent post-Wik-decision calls for “bucketloads of extinguishment” of native title,40 and in the rise of Pauline Hanson’s political movement. And in Prime Minister John Howard’s pained, manic defence of the Australia that he feels is being denigrated by those who point to the injustice invited upon the indigenous, we see a refusal to deeply engage with those aspects of the past which threaten the image of Australia as the just, humane society: evidence enough that for some the process of mourning is not being carried through, and the loss angrily denied.

The most persistent argument mounted against reconciliation, and any step in the direction of taking indigenous claims seriously, is that which points to the irreconcilable rift between “savagery” and “civilisation”. Some continue to defend an unequivocal notion of progress and an unshakable belief in the west’s necessary and, in certain senses, virtuous cultural, political and economic ascendancy over everybody else. Such accounts of the inevitable movement of history leave no room at all for the cultural legitimacy of those colonised “others”. The cultural and other achievements of the colonised are considered meagre by comparison with those of their colonisers, and for the most part the colonised are considered by their colonisers as ill-equipped for the requirements of a modern society. The fact that many of the colonised continue to adhere to certain of their cultural habits, and their identities, is considered illogical, futile and proof that such people continue to suffer under the sway of past illusions. For such thinkers, or ideologists, the working out on the ground of a negotiation between different traditions is inconceivable. “Logic”, and especially the opposition “tribal” versus “civilisation”, decides the issue in advance—whatever the cost, one might add. Whether the “logical” claim is ultimately

40 The Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer made the claim that the Wik amendment bill would provide “bucketloads of extinguishment of native title,” on PM, ABC Radio, May 16, 1997.
correct or not, in its own terms, does not alter the fact that it serves as an ideology in the sense that I emphasised in chapter one. That is, it serves to rule out accommodation between coloniser and colonised, and the reciprocity involved in the acceptance of cultural legitimacy. In so doing, most importantly, threatening claims of the indigenous, especially over land, cannot be sustained—the indigenous right to ancestral land has been cancelled out by a history that has overtaken them. The audacity and confidence of such claims in an age where modernity and its processes have come under sustained, and in many cases, justified attack, is truly breathtaking.

In this chapter I have explored reconciliation from several sides: those who endorse it, those who are lukewarm about it, and those who oppose it. The lukewarm and the opposers, in their different ways argue the same point: indigenous Australians have to accept the situation of the settler nation, and become like all other Australians. That means for example that they should make no special claims for land or for indigenous rights; rather they should push for full equality—which they already possess in a formal sense as citizens—and fully embrace the rights and responsibilities shared by all Australians. But is there a parallel embrace of the indigenous involved among those who support the reconciliation process, which signals at best a partial working through of the loss of the old idea of Australian nationhood? The way that a harking after “one people in one continent” is so prominently on display in reconciliation discourse would suggest that this is so. The mourning of that idea and dream of the one national culture extending throughout the entire continent is yet to begin among many of the advocates of reconciliation.

Is it possible to respect and honour difference without seeking to rush to incorporate it in order to benefit ourselves? For incorporation is also a kind of devouring. Is it not possible to say, “This history belongs to them, and it is a powerful history” without then saying “It must become ours”? Isn't that making a demand of indigenous people that the non-indigenous have no right to make, but which they make from a position of power as the condition under which they will enter a reconciliation process? Rather, what settler-Australians need to begin to formulate is a way of thinking
about forms of co-existence that do not have to assume all the old baggage of nationalism.

This would require that settler-Australians display a willingness to engage in an ongoing negotiation with the indigenous, and that the latter's identities and claims are taken seriously and accorded legitimacy. It would call upon all individuals and groups to accept a level of flexibility in territorial arrangements and agreements. In other words, the relationship between the indigenous and the surrounding state would be understood as an ongoing process of political negotiation, some of the outcomes of which cannot be foreseen. Clearly, such an acceptance requires a neutralisation of those fears about community, territory and internal enemies that I have highlighted repeatedly in this thesis. It would mean acceptance that the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous is not simply defined by the framework of a unified nation-state, but by an international framework in which that relationship exists. This would include the acceptance of international monitoring of state conduct in the area of indigenous affairs, giving a legitimate voice to international forums, developing international law, and to United Nations committees like the Working Party on Indigenous Populations, to comment on the adequacy of relations between the indigenous and the settler state, without retreating immediately behind the wall of national sovereignty. In other words there needs to be an acceptance of the fact that in some areas of relations it is not a question of national sovereignty, but of the basis for co-existence of different political communities within the same territory.\(^{41}\)

Such a way of perceiving things is clearly at odds with conceptions of nation-state authority and sovereignty within territorial boundaries and will be seen by some as the giving up of Australian independence. How the development of such political trends and movements can be contained is very difficult to answer.

\(^{41}\)David Mercer has noted the significance of “the fact that since 1991, under the terms of the International Covenant on Civil Rights, it has been possible for Aborigines to bypass the Australian commonwealth and state governments and deal directly with the UN Human Rights Committee on sovereignty and related issues.” See David Mercer, “Terra Nullius, Aboriginal sovereignty and land rights in Australia: the debate continues”, 1993, p. 303.
And yet, at the same time, it can be argued that the real, and politically unavoidable, challenge for that democratic state, and for those who truly want to defend it, is to continue to engage in a process of negotiation over rights and responsibilities that enables it to preserve its level of unity, and to convince all parties that it is worth preserving.
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