The Northern Territory Intervention: The Symbolic Value of 'Authentic' Indigeneity and Impoverishment, and the Interests of the (Progressive) Liberal Left

Mitchell Rolls

Abstract: In August 2007 the federal Howard government announced The Northern Territory National Emergency Response, known more prosaically as 'The Intervention'. This initiative was hurriedly implemented to address a broad range of issues highlighted in 'The Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse'. The report bore a title expressing a traditional Yolngu belief (north east Arnhem Land) that for some unexplained reason had been translated into a language from the central desert. This was paraphrased in the emotive and cloying English subtitle 'Little Children are Sacred,' and it is the latter by which the report is widely known.

This paper does not canvass the 'Intervention' itself, but a specific albeit long standing issue it brought to the fore. Implicitly if not explicitly, many critics find in the ostensibly classical Aboriginal cultures of remote and impoverished communities an authentic indigeneity. For a range of interests arising most often external to the communities concerned, there is a reluctance to countenance any prospective change that could stem the replenishing of these supposed wellsprings of originary authenticity. In this respect both settler and Aboriginal critics have found common ground in arguing that they represent the interests of the communities on whose behalf they supposedly speak. In elaborating these issues the following paper discusses the divisions between opponents and supporters of the 'emergency response', the tension between those with investments in the issues of rights, racism, and identity, and the interests of those experiencing the impoverished conditions of so many remote and regional communities. Central to these debates is the fraught issue of who can speak for whom, with an Aboriginal elite finding their authority as spokespeople challenged by those whose interests they presume to represent. These issues help explain why so many of the Aboriginal elite and the liberal left in general emphasise racism and discrimination over class, and why a politics of difference is privileged over culture.

In the final lecture of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's 1968 Boyer Lectures, the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner related a poignant story concerning his seeing an 'elderly widower … destroying something in a fire'. Upon questioning the man advised Stanner 'he was "killing his dreaming."' Explaining the gravity of this action Stanner relates:

> There is nothing within our ken that remotely resembles it. He was destroying the symbol that linked him with his country, with the source of his own life, and with all the continuities of his people. It was a kind of personal suicide, an act of severance, before he came in to find a new life and a new identity amongst us.[i]

A second man Stanner knew, suffering the same losses of clan and country as the first, brought his family 'in' so that his children could go to school, so that they could 'find a new life and a new identity.'[ii] Stanner provides these accounts not to highlight profound loss, but as a way of illustrating two undervalued 'aspects of the aboriginal struggle.' These being: '[T]heir continued will to survive, the other their continued efforts to come to terms with us'.[iii] Conspicuous in these descriptions is the sense of indigenous agency. Notwithstanding the exigencies arising from dispossession and the typical destruction wrought by settler societies of the social, environmental and economic conditions that had long sustained indigenous life, these are not the stories of a people quietly acquiescing under the weight of an accepted fate, but instead of individuals exercising agency in the context of new challenges. Whereas a short time following Stanner's lectures conventional schooling would be widely criticised for supposedly transmitting to Aborigines specific values and knowledge alien and threatening to their cultures,[iv] there is recognition (and no doubt some hope) in the actions of the men as cited by Stanner that education will equip children for a future beyond that experienced within the vestiges of classical Aboriginal culture and that experienced within the dispossessed margins. If Stanner's account is correct, the individuals did not seek to deploy the status of victimhood by way of critique of their circumstances, nor was Stanner tempted to attribute such status or to exploit glib sentiment.[v]

The 2012 Northern Territory (NT) election (Saturday 25 August) saw several Aborigines contest and win seats for the conservative Country-Liberal party (CLP). The contestants included former Labor party supporters and members and one—Alison Nampitjinpa Anderson—was a former Labor minister. The Labor party, both at the federal and state/territory level, was long regarded as the party that best represented indigenous interests. Whilst generally true, support for Labor in the Northern Territory was strongest in remote communities and regions, and electorally these were Labor's strongholds. Yet in the 2012 elections it was these regions that delivered government to the CLP. At the last CLP victory in 1997 (Labor held office from 2001 to 2012), of the seven seats Labor retained five were in the remote and pastoral districts and two only were in Darwin. Of the eight seats won by Labor in the 2012 CLP victory, two are in the remote districts with the other six being Darwin-based.[vi] That there are leaders and prominent members of remote Aboriginal communities, comprising former Labor party supporters and even a former Labor member of the Northern Territory legislative assembly, seeking candidacy, winning seats and being instrumental in delivering office to a party long thought to be inimical to Aboriginal interests, raises issues relevant not only to the actions of the men cited above, but also to the disputatious reaction to the 'emergency response' in the Northern Territory.[vii]

In a speech delivered in March 2006 the shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Chris Evans, reflected on the ideological convictions of the major Australian political parties vis-à-vis indigenous policy. Neither party's stance, Evans argued, effected the betterment of indigenous welfare. Whereas the conservative coalition were pursuing practical measures as ameliorative redress, when in government Labor had

> pursued an agenda that focused on rights, reconciliation and self-determination. We invested a great deal of energy and political capital into this agenda … But Labor has been too complacent about our record, and self-satisfied with claims to moral superiority. We put too much faith in the capacity of the rights agenda, self-determination and reconciliation to overcome Indigenous disadvantage.[viii]

Evans warned that both Labor and the Coalition should 'be held to account and ideology removed as the driver of Indigenous public policy'.[ix] When a little over 12 months later the coalition government announced the Northern Territory National Emergency Response, any hope of ideological convictions being shelved let alone softening were dashed. Convictions instead hardened and became increasingly polarised. This was notwithstanding the fact that federally the 'intervention' enjoyed bi-partisan support, and that the subsequent Labor government continued and extended many of its measures. It was beyond parliamentary cloisters where the clash of ideologies manifested. Most shrill were the so-called 'progressives' on the left, charged with the fervour of their long unchallenged 'self-satisfied … claims to moral superiority.' But the clash of ideologies also emerged in other contexts. Latent tensions erupted between the professional class of urban-based southern Aborigines, many of whom are light- or white-skinned, and self-described 'bush blacks', most of whom are dark-skinned. The capacity for (and propensity of) the former to speak for the latter came under increasing challenge. Many whites too who for long thought they were at the vanguard of advocating for indigenous interests similarly found themselves the target of searing criticism. Marcia Langton, for example, accused the high profile members behind the Women for Wik group who campaign for Aboriginal rights (and who are voluble in their opposition to the intervention) of peddling 'failed sentimental policies … that utterly dehumanise' those they are supposedly speaking up for.[x]

Writing of culture, identity and diversity, the Princeton scholar K. Anthony Appiah notes how despite 'the fact … that the black middle class' in the United States is 'larger and doing better than it ever has; … it is largely people from that class, not the poor, who have led the fight for the recognition of a distinctive African-American cultural heritage'.[xi] Appiah wonders 'whether there isn't a connection between the thinning of the cultural content of identities and the rising stridency of their claims'.[xii] In part provoked by a 'narcissism of minor differences',[xiii] similarly strident claims—together with expressions of antipathy and sometimes explicit racism against 'whites'—are commonplace on university campuses (and other institutions) in both the US and Australia, despite universities having a suite of programmes and initiatives in place to address the needs and sensitivities of black (US) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Australia), and despite providing one of the most racially and culturally tolerant institutional environments.[xiv] It was experience of indigenous-specific policies and initiatives like these and the manner in which they could be and are exploited that led Kerryn Pholi, who describes herself as 'a person of Aboriginal descent,' to burn her 'proof of Aboriginality' letter.[xv] She recalls working in identified positions[xvi] in government jobs, where as:

> a professional Aborigine, I could harangue a room full of people with real qualifications and decades of experience with whatever self-serving, uninformed drivel that happened to pop into my head. For this nonsense I would be rapturously applauded, never questioned, and paid well above my qualifications and experience.[xvii]

Further, Pholi knows she was 'a party to unfairness, abuses of power' and had 'the power to ruin a career with an accusation of "insensitivity"'.[xviii] These are familiar issues to those working in the institutional settings of government and universities, where what has become known as the 'race card' can be and is often adroitly deployed in the self-serving (and often racist) manner described by Pholi.

The strident activism of the black middleclass and Appiah's discussion is pertinent to the heated debate concerning the 'Intervention' or 'Stronger Futures' as it is now known. The schism between the (predominantly) urban black (though often light- or white- skinned) middle class and spokespeople from remote constituencies—'bush blacks as they call themselves'[xix]— manifests in language that is frequently intemperate, personal and malicious. Somewhat ironically, many settler intellectuals and advocates for indigenous issues who are highly critical of white political elites and what they see as this class's effacement of Aboriginal interests enjoin with Aboriginal elites in disparaging and dismissing so-called community voices (the 'bush blacks') who dare to articulate an opinion that differs from their own. Their support for the marginalised and impoverished is only sustained insofar as there is convergence between their politics, a convergence forged through similar educational trajectories and the hegemony of specific discourses about human rights, minorities, and culture.[xx] In a searing rebuke to these aligned interests Noel Pearson, a prominent Aboriginal leader, describes the constituency who holds them as being '*morally vain* about race and history'. 'Its members' he says,

> largely come from the liberal left and are morally certain about right and wrong and ready to ascribe blame. For them, issues of race and history are a means of gaining the upper hand over their political and cultural opponents. The primary concern of the morally vain is not the plight or needs of those who suffer racism and oppression, but rather their view of themselves, their understanding of the world and belief in their superiority over their opponents.[xxi]

A well publicised incident concerning Professor Larissa Behrendt and comments she made on social media site twitter is illustrative. In April 2011 Bess Price, a Central Australian Aboriginal leader and a partner with her husband in Jajirdi Consultants, which offers Warlpiri language services and cross cultural training amongst other things, appeared on the ABC television programme *Q&A*.[xxii] Asked by the host if she still supported the Northern Territory intervention Price replied:

> I am for the intervention because I've seen progress. I've seen women who now have voices. They can speak for themselves and they are standing up for their rights. Children are being fed and young people more or less know how to manage their lives. That's what's happened since the intervention.[xxiii]

Now living in Alice Springs, Price is from Yuendumu where she is variously described as having been born 'under a tree'[xxiv] or 'in a humpy'.[xxv] Yuendumu is a community that frequently appears in the press for a range of incidents relating to dysfunction, the

precipitating factors for some of which the 'intervention' would supposedly address. As with many other grass roots remote community members, particularly the women, Price is generally supportive of many of the measures of the intervention, though this support is by no means unqualified.

Nevertheless, Price's comments were sufficient to prompt Behrendt to tweet that she 'had watched a show where a guy had sex with a horse and I'm sure it was less offensive than Bess Price'.[xxvi] On national ABC radio the next morning a disappointed Price said 'I just want my kids to have the same opportunities that Larissa has had'.[xxvii] Behrendt, who has been admitted to practice as a solicitor and barrister (NSW & ACT) and who is currently Professor of Law and Director of Research at the Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney, holds degrees from the University of New South Wales and a PhD from Harvard. Growing up in Sydney's southern suburbs (Cronulla), she is the beneficiary of education at leading institutions, and an outspoken critic of 'the intervention'. Professor Marcia Langton, an anthropologist, renowned scholar and prominent advocate for indigenous people, wrote a scathing response to Behrendt's comment for the *Australian* newspaper. Langton contrasted Price's experience in and knowledge of the poorest remote Aboriginal communities, the conditions endured, the abuses suffered by the women and children, her long term advocacy for her people and work towards addressing these problems, with Behrendt's ignorance born out of privilege, tertiary education, and a cosseted city lifestyle. This incident, Langton proclaimed,

> is an exemplar of the wide cultural, moral and increasingly political rift between urban, left-wing, activist Aboriginal women and the bush women who witness the horrors of life in their communities, much of which is arrogantly denied by the former.[xxviii]

It is here too where there is convergence between the progressive politics of predominantly urban-based, middleclass, educated black and white, and their respective interests in remote Aboriginal communities. As Pearson dryly observes, where Behrendt 'is coming from is where most black and white people of her inner-city intellectual milieu come from. She can hardly be condemned for holding views that are de rigeur in progressive society and politics'.[xxix]

Whilst on the one hand deploring the enduring and seemingly intractable conditions (housing, unemployment, educational standards, poverty, poor health, child sexual abuse, distress and so on), that is the lot of many on numerous indigenous communities, there is on the other a discernible interest in maintaining communities that are not only ostensibly traditional but also impoverished. This concern is primarily motivated by interests external to the communities themselves, as evident in the following exchange. The senior Yolgnu (Northern Territory) leader Galarrwuy Yunupingu, for long a trenchant critic of 'sit-down' welfare, describes it as 'a killer' of his people. Yunupingu regards welfare as one of the underlying factors precipitating community dysfunction. In its place he advocates 'real education' and full participation in the broader economy. Yunupingu, like Pearson, believes these are the avenues towards achieving the strength, resilience and independence necessary to sustain vibrant and enduring native cultures.[xxx] Michael Mansell, a lawyer and leader of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, responded to Yunupingu in a letter to the *Australian* newspaper:

> [W]elfare payments, [Mansell wrote], is no more a killing of culture than are Toyotas, rifles, jobs or TV. Real education, as Mr Yunupingu

puts it, is another form of killing a culture, not a saviour of it. White schools for Aborigines has its value but can also lead to loss of language, religion and alienation from Aboriginal values and authority.[xxxi]

For activists like Mansell, remote Aboriginal communities are abstractions, idealised sites upon which various interests are grafted. One can sense in much advocacy reputedly on behalf of remote Aborigines a palpable fear that these communities will seek—like the two aforementioned men cited by Stanner—opportunities beyond that which they are currently afforded. In addition to tiring of being spoken for instead of listened to by southerners, the quest to secure the broader opportunities that education and skills provide was an impetus behind those Aborigines like Price who contested the 2012 Northern Territory election. The *Australian* newspaper reported (albeit derivatively and in clichés) the Tiwi Islander candidate Francis Xavier Maralampuwi, as having:

> a dream … that his people rise up from the plains of disadvantage and ascend the foothills of training and education to the top of the mountain—to the promised land where jobs and independence beckon.[xxxii]

If this was to be realised change to the cultural fabric of the Tiwi is inevitable. At the same time any such change would provide for the Tiwi being better able to determine their futures (both as a community and as individuals), which is precisely the kind of empowerment sought by Yunupingu, Pearson, Langton and many others, including those on remote communities and many supporters of the 'intervention'. Significantly, in the Northern Territory election in 'each of the four seats where the CLP fielded traditional, cultural and, above all, locally born and reared candidates, it won against less traditional-seeming Aboriginal Labor candidates or members, often without indigenous language'.[xxxiii] As Aikman reports, the 'significance of tradition, culture, language and local origins in each of these results cannot be underestimated'.[xxxiv]

The etic interest in maintaining the ostensibly classical cultural forms still extant on remote and impoverished Aboriginal communities predates the more recent criticism of the 'intervention'. In an article for *The Age* in 2001, and suspicious that assimilationist rhetoric was gaining a foothold, Robert Manne wrote of the possibility of remote communities being destroyed, and that 'one distinctive expression of human life, with its own forms of language, culture, spirituality and sensibility, will simply become extinct'.[xxxv] In making this statement Manne (probably unintentionally) casts doubt on the claims to distinctiveness made by many Aborigines, including those living contemporary urban middleclass lives. Manne's concern locates authentic Aboriginal culture in distant, relatively isolated communities. Despite whatever claims are made for cultural distinctiveness—predominantly articulated as they are through the trope of identity politics and minority rights—Manne is not according the urban-based black middle-class the substance of their claims.

There are also traces in Manne's concern of the impetus behind so-called salvage anthropology, and the long dated notion of establishing reserves where Aborigines could be spared the travails of alien contact so as to enjoy their 'distinctive expression of human life' free of corrosive influence. Strehlow spoke in 1963 of 'the old Aboriginal world … now facing its final twilight', and the notion that research had to be undertaken 'before it was too late' was for decades the catalyst for anthropological and ethnographic documentation.[xxxvi] Already in 1899 Baldwin Spencer was of the belief that 'the time in

which it will be possible to investigate the Australian native tribes is rapidly drawing to a close'.[xxxvii]

For early to mid-twentieth-century anthropologists the quest was to document what they believed were originary forms of indigenous social and cultural life. For today's Aborigines from urban environments and / or who are removed from more traditionally-oriented communities, remote groups still on their land and of recognisable phenotype and who are still in possession of an array of readily identifiable classical cultural markers (language, ceremony, land, community and so on) serve as the touchstone for their own sense of authenticity and identity. To take but one example, Anita Heiss, the Aboriginal novelist, spokesperson and adept user of social media[xxxviii] defiantly proclaims on the opening page of her *Am I Black Enough for You?* that 'I am an urban, beachside blackfella, a concrete Koori with Westfield Dreaming, and I apologise to no-one'.[xxxix] Heiss makes much of her loathing of camping and the outdoors in general (if it involves 'roughing' it), and jests that '*Five Stars* are the only stars I want to sleep under'.[xl] Her story as a 'proud Wiradjuri woman' is one of '*not* being from the desert, *not* speaking my traditional language and *not* wearing ochre'.[xli] But 'country' is invoked as a signifier of unique indigenous place and heritage, and by extension, identity. Whilst 'Greater Sydney' is her home, 'it is not *my* country. My spirit belongs and will finally rest with those of my ancestors back in Wiradjuri ngurumbang (country)'.[xlii] It is arguable that the sense of 'country' a reader is supposed to glean from mentions such as this is reliant upon readers 'knowing' of the 'special relationship' Aborigines are said to enjoy with the country of their livelihoods (in the broadest sense) as experienced by pre-contact cultures, and as codified in Land Rights legislation and the Native Title Act.[xliii]

Dallas Scott notes how many Aborigines distant from stereotypical cultural markers (and often those representing or speaking for Aborigines in various institutional settings) 'talk in circles, often spending an inordinate amount of time describing small, inconsequential things. Like a shield they once saw, or an Elder they spoke to. Often, they'll use a small smattering of an Aboriginal language … to punctuate their speech with more credibility'.[xliv] Having spoken with an 'elder', or having an 'Elder's' permission to utter something or perform an activity are typical statements of both cultural gravitas and authenticity.[xlv] So too is salting both speeches and text with words drawn from Aboriginal languages (as instanced above). To cite another example, a flyer promoting an Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies seminar was titled 'Nayri Kati: An Indigenous Quantitative Methodology'. The presenter, who identifies as 'a trawlwoolway woman of the pymmerrairrener nation of north east Tasmania', claimed in the abstract that 'In this paper I outline nayri kati (good numbers in palawa kani Tasmanian language) my quantitative methodology that constructs all stages of the research practice through an Indigenous lens'.[xlvi]

The evocative term 'community', like 'country' and claims to having spoken with an elder or sprinkling indigenous words throughout one's work, is another of the devices deployed to invoke gravitas, authenticity and a sense of indigenous place. But as Scott quips, the evocative invocation of 'community' often refers to a context far more familiar—Canberra for instance— than the signifier conjures.[xlvii] The cultural imprimatur sought through invocations like these is not through the flesh and blood of an intimate connection with those still living a recognisably distinctive cultural life, or living such a life oneself, but rather through the weight of semiotic significance, the implicit pointers to a classical heritage that these signs evince: dark skin, language, ceremony, dance,

cicatrices, ochre, painting, community, land, spiritual depth, and culturally distinctive ways of apprehending the world and relating to it.

Aborigines who have no embrace of classical culture or indigenous language (but who enjoy the general lifestyle and full range of opportunities available to the middleclass), and who are often spokespeople on indigenous issues within universities and the public sector, rely on discourses on racism, human rights, minorities, culture and a suite of tropes gleaned from postcolonial scholarship and identity politics with which to forge and defend their identity, and voice their opinion. Memories of being identified as indigenous in the schoolyard, classroom and when growing up and bearing the brunt of racist taunts come to the fore. On an SBS programme comprising an indigenous panel and a mostly indigenous participatory audience discussing the issue of skin colour, identity, and the divide between southern Aborigines and those in remote Australia the white-skinned Aboriginal lawyer and University of Melbourne academic Mark McMillan argued that Aboriginality was not based on however one looked, but on 'how they've lived their life'.[xlviii] However, it was experiences of racism that McMillan emphasised, not cultural or 'way of life' markers:

> I have seen my family be spat at, I've been, when I grew up, I was the albino boong. There is absolutely a lived experience that comes with Aboriginality and that is not predicated on skin colour and yet we are all out here saying, 'But you, looking whiter than me, have had a more privileged existence than me.' And I rally against that understanding because we are Aboriginal by definition because of what's been imposed but it is also because of the way other people have treated us and our families.[xlix]

The power of the allegation of having experienced racism to provoke an empathetic response, and the difficulty in sensitively and compassionately unpacking and critiquing claims made contingent on that experience is perhaps one reason why as a device it is so often deployed. Nevertheless Dallas Scott, an eloquent contributor to these debates through his blog 'The Black Steam Train', and who like McMillan was one of the indigenous panellists on the above SBS programme, puts such claims into sharp relief:

> Overhearing a racist joke or comment is so far removed from being rejected dozens of times for rental properties or jobs for no other reason than the way you look … Having two people in primary school call you a name after you told them you are Aboriginal is a walk in the park compared to having that label applied to you almost every day, and that label sticking with you long past the days of the schoolyard, without having to utter a word about your heritage to anyone.[l]

As Scott is suggesting, for many the slights and discrimination of being Othered is an experience reliant on those individuals Othering themselves in order to construct and sustain an identity not otherwise apparent. Critique of these proclaiming practices, no matter how rigorously objective and sensitively handled, invites strategic offence to be taken. The Stanford University academic Shelby Steele discusses how blacks in the US in the 1960s would deploy 'race' in conventional settings almost as a parlour game:

> Those were the days of flagellatory white guilt; it was such great fun to pinion some professor or housewife or, best of all, a large group of

remorseful whites, with the knowledge of both their racism and their denial of it.[li]

These '*power* moves', Steele writes, 'are the underdog's bite'.[lii] However, for middleclass blacks (and Australian Aborigines of the middleclass) the complaint of discrimination and resultant disadvantage is harder to sustain, and the values peculiar to this class are at odds with 'an emphasis on ethnic consciousness over individualism … [and] an implied separatism'.[liii] Whereas class was in the heady days of the 1960s (US) and 1970s (Australia) subjugated to the power inherent in racial unity in order to maximise political leverage, the transition of the black middleclass out of the very conditions that gave rise to the moral authority and political identity forged in the 'common experience of oppression' and victimisation,[liv] has also cleaved this group from a powerful source of their collective identity. As Steele notes, 'To overcome marginal status, the middle-class black had to identify with a degree of victimization that was beyond his [sic] actual experience'.[lv]

This situation has led to some black intellectuals being nostalgic for Jim Crow:

> They're nostalgic … not exactly for racism but for the distinctive social practices … that the resistance to racism helped create. On the one hand, Jim Crow impoverished and disempowered an entire community; on the other, it solidified that community's identity as a community. The creation of a distinctive African American culture was thus both a consequence of racism and a kind of compensation for it.[lvi]

This helps explain the propensity of predominantly middleclass southern-based Aborigines to emphasise racism (over class) and their own experiences of discrimination (as noted above).[lvii] It also helps to explain why identity (if not race) is privileged over culture. Although deploying notions of race and assertions of identity permit allusions to cultural distinctiveness, where such distinctiveness is not readily apparent (amongst the light-skinned urban-based middleclass for example), race and identity become the scaffolding upon which generalist cultural claims are supposed. The discourses and epithets of racism and discrimination are also more easily acquired. This is because of their ubiquitousness and the demotic ease with which these usually un-theorised terms superficially can be understood—and more powerfully deployed due to the inflammatory nature of the charge. Cultural esotery is not so readily deployed, particularly if one's class or distance from one's supposed cultural base keeps one at a remove from the actual or putative sites of cultural production and learning.

On the other hand, white professionals, academics, among others, who have profound knowledge of Australian indigenous cultures—who often have long affiliation and intimacies with communities and individuals sometimes spanning decades, who sometimes themselves are the mothers and fathers of indigenous children, and some of whom are fluent in one or more native languages—are often treated with contempt or have their expertise dismissed. This is because they possess (or might do so) understandings that are contrary to the 'cultural knowledge' uttered by those Aborigines at a distance or long removed from the source of the 'traditional' knowledge they propound.[lviii] Remote Aborigines stress the long, arduous and slow processes of cumulative instruction and passage through initiatory stages essential to acquiring the sort of knowledge now claimed by others.[lix] As argued by Lynne Hume,

> [t]here is a shift from the acquisition of knowledge gained through complete immersion in Aboriginal Law pertaining to locale and 'looking after country' by being there, to a type of distanced affective intuitive knowledge. The connection, or spiritual continuity, is now being professed through blood links, intimating a kind of intuitive, or genetic, transmission of spiritual knowledge.[lx]

Although few ever point to the disparities between claims made and the actual contexts from which those claims are supposedly drawn—and it is certainly arguable that these disparities should be raised—the fear of the emperor's expose remains. Aborigines from remote Australia, such as Bess Price, represent an even greater threat, for whereas whites can be dismissed with ready-to-hand pejoratives wrought from ideological conviction or political suasion—racist, ignorant, culturally insensitive and so on[lxi]—Price, and not only in the popular imagination, speaks from a position grounded in the very conditions—cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, community, land—that 'white' Aborigines ultimately draw upon to authenticate their identity.

The late South Australian Aboriginal academic Maria Lane, in an unpublished paper—'Two Indigenous Populations? Two Diverging Paradigms?'—identified distinctive Aboriginal groupings, 'each operating on completely different, in fact antithetical, dynamics, ethics and paradigms'.[lxii] Lane described these as the 'Welfare-Embedded Population' and an 'Open Society Population'. Although finding these populations mostly on former settlements and reserves and in cities respectively, these broad categories are useful for they are inclusive of constituencies beyond the generalised binaries of 'bush blacks' and an indigenous urban-based elite. Members of the 'Open Society' category are also found in Central, Northern and remote Australia, and there are many regional and urban-based indigenous communities who remain marginalised, voiceless and largely unrepresented. Aboriginal intellectuals like Marcia Langton, Noel Pearson and Warren Mundine amongst others, who contest much of the progressive liberal left orthodoxy on indigenous issues, are themselves members of the political elite, but Pearson from Cape York is not southern or city-based. Nevertheless, among more nuanced distinctions Lane's groupings account for the apparent division between the so-called 'bush' Aborigines and the predominantly urban-based elite who often assume the right to speak on their behalf. Lane recognised too the dependency of the latter on the former, who whilst in permanent employment and sending their own children to private schools and being the beneficiaries of all that contemporary society and culture has to offer, 'often [see] themselves as spokespersons and champions of, [build] their secure careers on the backs of, and [gain] their kudos from, the Embedded Population'.[lxiii] Whereas in the 1970s Aborigines were demanding the right to represent themselves directly instead of through white intermediaries, more recently one particular indigenous constituency—the 'Open Society Population'—has seized suzerainty over that platform. The French anthropologist Maïa Ponsonnet, who in 2007 on the 'Women for Wik' website agreed with the description of the Northern Territory 'intervention' 'as a form of cultural genocide',[lxiv] wrote the same year how she finds:

> [the] lack of distinction between the southern rural context and the northern remote context to be a common mistake. It is the northern context that is often ignored, as the remote community voice is seldom relayed in the media, des-pite (sic) the attention these communities receive. … [Further], [m]embers of remote communities are given few opportunities to speak in the media, while articulate representatives of

> southern communities express themselves regularly. They create a stream of opinions which, while not necessarily reflecting the views of remote community members, tends to stand alone as the Aboriginal voice.[lxv]

Besides the problem of the so-called 'bush' Aborigines being spoken for—and in the instance of Bess Price (and others) being abused on the occasion when their distinctive voice has been heard—is that of the triumph of concern with diversity over inequality. Tolerance for 'difference', rather than the need to address poverty or marginalisation, becomes the prominent issue. To this end—tolerance for difference—affirmative action policies have a tendency to focus attention on, exaggerate and concretise the hitherto fluid phenomena of identity, culture and consequentially, difference. Writing of the situation on campuses in the US, Steele observes how:

> [w]hen everyone is on the run from their anxieties about race, race relations on campus can be reduced to the negotiation of avoidances. A pattern of demand and concession develops in which both sides use the other to escape themselves. Black studies departments, black deans of student affairs, black counselling programs, … black students and white administrators have slowly engineered a machinery of separatism that, in the name of sacred difference, redraws the ugly lines of separation.[lxvi]

Whilst separatism is not so pronounced on Australian campuses, policies and administration based on a similar emphasis on a politics of difference wield considerable influence in the academies, and across a broad sweep of organisations and institutions. Notwithstanding the complexities and sensitivities these issues can arouse, in the interests of being seen to be conciliatory and fearful of opportunistic backlash institutional management when confronted with day-to-day issues where the potential for 'race'-based political conflict is sensed, often does nothing, or when it does, it seeks appeasement rather than address.[lxvii] As Steele states apropos the US, university management tend 'to go along with whatever blacks put on the table'[lxviii] and that 'rather than negotiating and capitulating' to all such demands, what is required is 'leading', 'challenging' and 'inspiring [blacks] to achieve academic parity' as well as 'dismantling the machinery of separatism [and] breaking the link between difference and power …'.[lxix]

In addition to the fear of being called on an expedient allegation of racism, and perhaps motivated by a belief that indulging Aboriginal demands is necessary in order to help restore dignity to a people long stigmatised, vociferous exploiters of the politics of difference are rewarded with recognition that their claims to cultural competency on matters indigenous are sacrosanct and unproblematic. The experiences of Pholi[lxx] cited earlier are typical. This late settler-colonialism of the early twenty-first century, of 'negative difference, vulnerability, protection and guardianship', earnestly spruiked by Aboriginal spokespeople and academics belonging to Lane's 'Open Society Population', notwithstanding the few dissenting voices from within this same constituency, and more broadly by the liberal left, has more in common with 'Australian Indigenous affairs in the first third of the twentieth century', than either the 1960's demand for equal legal rights or the following era of self-determination.[lxxi] Besides the obvious condescension— Aborigines are incapable of withstanding scrutiny, behaving professionally, or achieving academically without 'Indigenous-specific educational interventions', or in Pearson's words, 'Indigenous people's status as victims means they require protection from the real world.'[lxxii]—a consequence is the inevitable rise of powerful shibboleths founded on notions of identity and cultural competency.

As in the United States vis-à-vis African Americans, the issue of cultural competency ranges across various institutional settings, not just the academy or its representative union.[lxxiii] Writing of child placement policies in the United States that prescribe the placing of black children with black families and where that is not possible assessment of the racial competency of prospective white adoptees, Randall Kennedy, a black Professor of Law at Harvard, observes that:

> [p]lainly there is no proper authoritative criterion for grading the racial appropriateness of parenting—only the very real spectre of an imposition of orthodoxies that come innocuously packaged as 'cultural competency.' The chilling effect that religious or cultural or racial competency examinations create, the prejudices they elicit, and the tendency toward bullying that they encourage make them sources of unfairness and oppression that should be erased.[lxxiv]

As Steele notes also apropos the parallel situation in the US, 'each group mythologises and mystifies its difference, puts it beyond the full comprehension of outsiders. Difference becomes inaccessible preciousness toward which outsiders are expected to be simply and uncomprehendingly reverential'.[lxxv] Furthermore, as noted above, the learning supposedly underpinning the expertise informing the assumed difference-based competency is innate and experiential; formal learning is eschewed. When a historian with a long record of advocacy for Indigenous rights and who had done much work on various Native Title claims was appointed to the University of Tasmania on a three year contract his employment was challenged by a former indigenous staff member. The grounds for the challenge were that he was non-Indigenous. Stating that he saw his role in part as assisting those without the necessary qualifications to obtain them so that they could take over his role and that few things would please him more, his interlocutor asserted that she 'didn't have to have a university degree to teach Tasmanian Aboriginal history, for as Aborigines we just know it all already'.[lxxvi] Such claims are more frequent than might be supposed. As already discussed, many on remote communities, such as Price, are seeking for their children and communities the very education that those who are beneficiaries of promoting a politics of difference and who privilege 'race' and identity over inequality are contemptuous of.

The American literary theorist Walter Benn Michaels, professor of English at the University of Illinois at Chicago, argues in his *The Trouble with Diversity: How we Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*[lxxvii] that both the left and right of politics are committed to perpetuating inequality. He bases this on the investments that both sides have in the politics of difference. As a consequence, 'the deepest respect for difference is a powerful management tool'.[lxxviii] This is because by focussing on difference, or more usually diversity, the structural issues underlying inequality can be ignored, and the conditions of inequality can be rationalised as a form of difference that needs respecting:

> Greater indifference to inequality and ideology is happily accompanied by greater attachment to identity. In fact, this is what the commitment to diversity is all about, since a world of people who are different from us looks a lot more appealing than a world of people who are poorer than us or a world of people who think our fundamental beliefs are deeply mistaken.[lxxix]

Those Aborigines whose activism (and employment)[lxxx] centres on notions of identity and discrimination, and who mostly belong to the category that Lane describes as the 'Open Society Population', are of course worried about their material circumstances. This is not because of their own need, but because they are the beneficiaries of the discourses of diversity. Remote impoverished Aboriginal communities serve a dual role in this respect. They provide to Aboriginal constituents of the 'Open Society' (and the broader population) evidence of originary cultural forms that can be and are (as discussed above) drawn on in order to authenticate themselves culturally. They also provide abundant evidence of enduring socioeconomic inequality that is drawn on to authenticate arguments of prevalent racism and discrimination. Hence the pernicious investment that the 'Open Society Population' has in the disadvantage—sometimes extreme— experienced by so many remote communities, and the hostility they visit on those seeking means of address. However, if they themselves are 'authentically' indigenous, then addressing the inequality beleaguering remote communities should not diminish the Aboriginality or cultural distinctiveness of the members of those communities. The fear, it would seem, is one of losing the talisman for their own sense of self. As Michaels argues, 'It's the culture, stupid—when the problem is inequality, the solution is identity'.[lxxxi] And this is precisely what Price and the other three so-called 'traditional' Aborigines understand who won seats for and helped deliver government to the CLP in the 2012 Northern Territory election. While they want to address inequality, southern Aborigines amongst some others and the liberal left in general worry about racism and identity. As Michaels pithily puts it, 'the diversity version of respect the poor is respect the Other'.[lxxxii] In this way inequality is reconfigured as discrimination. The problem is not one of exploitation, but one of not respecting the cultures of remote communities. 'The debate we might have about inequality thus becomes a debate instead about prejudice and respect …'.[lxxxiii]

The response of the liberal left to the Northern Territory intervention is illustrative. In the introduction to the rushed-to-print *Coercive Reconciliation*,[lxxxiv] the anthropologist Melinda Hinkson lists the initiatives that she believes might 'receive widespread support from the Aboriginal residents' of the communities concerned. She includes 'increased police numbers, increased support for child and family health, improved housing and infrastructure, and improved quality of goods and management of community stores'. These ameliorative prospects, however, mask a more sinister objective: 'a clear intent … to bring to an end the recognition of, and support for, Aboriginal people living in remote communities pursuing culturally distinctive ways of life'.[lxxxv] Pat Turner and Nicole Watson, two of the 'Open Society Population' indigenous contributors, describe the intervention as a 'Trojan horse' designed to seize land granted under the Northern Territory Land Rights legislation. They express the hope that 'our enemies … find the courage to come out of the Trojan horse and offer friendship … From friendship comes understanding, respect and accommodation of difference'.[lxxxvi] The subtitle of the text, *Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia*[lxxxvii] points also to the privileging of difference, and an incapacity to imagine vibrant Aboriginal cultures surviving redress of inequality.

Conclusion

As with the broader community, with more Aborigines entering the middleclass, political and ideological divisions not only within that class but also between the bush and the city,

are increasingly manifest. Remote Aboriginal communities retain rich symbolic value for those distant from 'traditional' cultural forms, whether through historical or other factors such as individual choice. Their symbolic value is also recognised by settler Australians, who like many of the Aboriginal intellectual and political elite find in these communities semblances of what they believe to be originary cultural forms. The impoverishment and distress experienced by so many communities adds to the resonance of their symbolic value, for these conditions buttress assertions of enduring racism and discrimination against Aborigines per se, not just those living in these situations. This too serves the interests of both the Aboriginal political elite—who make mileage out of their own assumed victimhood and use this status to speak for all Aborigines and to make demands upon the institutions in which they work—and white intellectuals whose righteousness is perversely rewarded by recognising Aborigines as victims and themselves as the perpetrators of injustices. As described by Thomas Sowell, a black American economist and social theorist at Stanford University:

> a pro-black stance by white intellectuals enhances the latter's moral standing and self-esteem … By cheering on counterproductive attitudes, making excuses for self-defeating behaviour, and promoting the belief that 'racism' accounts for most of blacks' problems, white intellectuals serve their own psychic, ideological, and political interests.[lxxxviii]

Australian intellectuals are no exception. Sowell goes on to say that a 'crucial fact about white liberals must be kept in mind: They are not simply in favour of blacks in general. Their solicitude is poured out for blacks as victims … as well as those blacks who serve as general counter-cultural symbols against larger society'.[lxxxix] The Aboriginal intellectual and political elite in Australia direct their solicitudes similarly. The Northern Territory 'intervention' played into the hands of all of these interests. It enabled arguments to be made about victimhood and the usurpation of human rights, and remote impoverished communities are exemplary counter cultures. By seeking redress of some of the issues bedevilling the communities subject to the 'intervention' this initiative intersected with and potentially undercuts the considerable investments of both black and white in these communities. Much of the heat generated in the debate about the potential efficacy of the 'intervention' and the manner of its implementation arises not out of concern for the subject communities themselves, but out of already extant ideological interests in the capacity for abstracted ideals about these communities to service concerns largely external to them. Little wonder that 'bush' Aborigines have found their voice, and the power of the ballot.

---

[i] W.E.H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming* (Crows Nest: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1991), p. 55.

[ii] Stanner, *After*, p. 55.

[iii] Stanner, *After*, p. 55.

[iv] See Elliott (Commissioner) Johnston, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Volume 4*, (Canberra: 1991), Section 33.1.5; Stephen Harris, *Two-Way Aboriginal Schooling: Education and Cultural Survival* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1990). In *Two-Way Aboriginal Schooling* Harris argues that there are Indigenous-specific learning styles and that pedagogical practices must accommodate these differences in order to provide both effective education and one that is less threatening to the cultural values of Indigenous people. Despite serious problems with Harris' analysis it proved widely influential. As noted

in one of the earlier critiques of Harris, '"Learning styles" theory is now thoroughly embedded into the pedagogical practices of almost every Australian institution with a brief for Aboriginal education—in fact, in all probability that means every educational institution of this nature.' Christine Nicholls, Vicki Crowley, and Ron Watt, 'Theorising Aboriginal Education,' *Education Australia* 33 (1996), p. 6.

[v] See also W.E.H. Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979), p. 24.

[vi] Anthony Green, 'Final Figures for 2012 Northern Territory Election', http://blogs.abc.net.au/antonygreen/2012/09/northern-territory-election-updates.html, Accessed 2 September 2012.

[vii] Whilst largely continuing with initiatives commenced under the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007, on 16 July 2012 this act was replaced with the banally named Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act 2012.*

[viii] Chris Evans, 'The End of Ideology in Indigenous Affairs,' in *John Curtin Institute of Public Policy Conference* (Perth: Curtin University of Technology, 2006), p. 1, http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=4297, Accessed 28 August 2012.

[ix] Evans, 'The End of Ideology', p. 1.

[x] Marcia Langton, 'Stop the Abuse of Children,' *The Australian* (12 December 2007), http://blogs.theaustralian.news.com.au/yoursay/index.php/theaustralian/comments/stop_the_abuse_of_children/, Accessed 12 December 2007.

[xi] K. Anthony Appiah, 'The Multiculturalist Misunderstanding', *New York Review of Books* 44, 15 (1997), p. 32.

[xii] Appiah, 'The Multiculturalist', p. 32.

[xiii] See Mitchell Rolls, 'The Culture Brand and Racial Alterities,' *Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia* 2, 1 (2011), p. 8.

[xiv] See Shelby Steele, *The Content of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America* (New York: HarperPerennial, (1998 [1991]), pp. 111-48.

[xv] Kerryn Pholi, 'Why I Burned My "Proof of Aboriginality"', *The Drum* (ABC, 2012), http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/4281772.html, Accessed 27 September 2012. In Pholi's case, this 'proof' was 'a letter from the New South Wales Department of Education acknowledging that I was Aboriginal, on the basis that my local Aboriginal Lands Council at that time, circa 1990, had said so'. For comment on the arbitrariness of these acknowledgments, see Caroline Overington, 'Not So Black & White,' *The Australian* (24-25 March 2012), pp. 14-18; Dallas Scott, 'The Black Steam Train: Wayne Quilliam, You Made the Shit List,' http://theblacksteamtrain.blogspot.com.au/search?updated-min=2011-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&updated-max=2012-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&max-results=2, Accessed 1 September 2012; Scott, 'The Black Steam Train: Insight— That Aboriginality Show' (13 August 2012), http://theblacksteamtrain.blogspot.com.au/2012_08_01_archive.html, Accessed 15 August 2012; and Scott's blog site *The Black Steam Train* in toto: http://theblacksteamtrain.blogspot.com.au/.

[xvi] Identified positions are positions for which only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are eligible to apply for and occupy.

[xvii] Pholi, 'Why I Burned'.

[xviii] Pholi, 'Why I Burned'.

[xix] Gordon in Amos Aikman, 'Left Sent Message from the Bush,' *The Australian* (27 August 2012), p. 6.

[xx] On the influence of 'emancipatory', 'minority', 'culture' and 'human rights' discourses on the construction and defence of difference see Jane K Cowan, 'Ambiguities of an Emancipatory Discourse:

The Making of a Macedonian Minority in Greece', in Jane K Cowan, Marie-Benedicte Dembour, and Richard A Wilson (eds) *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 152-76.

xxi Noel Pearson, 'White Guilt, Victimhood and the Quest for a Radical Centre', *Griffith Review* 16, Winter (2007), p. 30 (his emphasis).

xxii Price was also a candidate for the CLP in the August 2012 Northern Territory election and won her seat.

xxiii Tony Jones, 'Defence, Discrimination and Regrets', *Q & A* (Australia: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 11 April 2011), http://www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/txt/s3182043.htm, Accessed 11 April 2011.

xxiv Stuart Rintoul, 'Cry from the Heart', *The Australian* (19 May 2012) http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/cry-from-the-heart/story-e6frg8h6-1226357817151, Accessed 20 May 2012; Bess Price, 'Listen to Our Voices and Address Our Real Concerns', *The Australian* (12-13 December 2009), p. 4.

xxv Amos Aikman, 'Voices of Authenticity', *The Australian* (15 November 2012), p. 13.

xxvi Marcia Langton, 'Aboriginal Sophisticates Betray Bush Sisters', *The Australian* (15 April 2011), http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/aboriginal-sophisticates-betray-bush-sisters/story-e6frgd0x-1226039349353, Accessed 18 April 2011.

xxvii On Fran Kelly, 'Breakfast', *Breakfast* (Australia: ABC, 12 March 2011) (Broadcast).

xxviii Langton, 'Aboriginal Sophisticates Betray Bush Sisters'. See also Patricia Karvelas, 'More Offensive than "Sex with a Horse": Behrendt's Twitter Slur Against Black Leader', *The Australian* (14 April 2011), pp.1-2.

xxix Noel Pearson, 'Education and Aspiration Keys to Membership of an Open Society', *The Australian* (23 April 2011), p. 1. http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/opinion/education-and-aspiration-keys-to-membership-of-an-open-society/story-e6frgd0x-1226043501865, Accessed 16 June 2011.

xxx Cited in Noel Pearson, 'Yolgnu Inspire Us to Pursue All Our Ambitions', *The Australian* (13 August 2011), http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/yolngu-inspire-us-to-pursue-all-our-ambitions/story-e6frg6zo-1226114050741, Accessed 13 August 2011.

xxxi Cited in Pearson, 'Yolgnu Inspire Us'. In an unpublished paper the Aboriginal academic Maria Lane points out that most of the current urban-based Indigenous elite, of whom Mansell is one—who occupy influential positions in government, academia, and so on—are the beneficiaries of education systems that did not provide 'Indigenous-specific educational interventions'. These measures, such as those advocated by Stephen Harris (see fn4), she described as 'being preoccupied with questions of "relevance, cultural sensitivity, language, racist theories such as learning-styles theory, appropriate curriculum, role of elders or parents or community, self-esteem, cooperativeness, need for outdoor activity, focus on sport, love of art, remoteness, etc."' Cited in Noel Pearson, 'Radical Hope: Education and Equality in Australia', *Quarterly Essay* 35 (2009), p. 34.

xxxii Amos Aikman, 'Indigenous Leaders Desert Labor for CLP', *The Australian* (6 August 2012), p. 5.

xxxiii Aikman, 'Voices of Authenticity', p. 13.

xxxiv Aikman, 'Voices of Authenticity', p. 13. The Tiwi Islander Francis Xavier Maralampuwi, who is often described by others as being 'traditional' and who describes himself as 'a cultural man,' won the seat of Arafura (which includes the Tiwi Islands) over the Labor candidate and fellow Tiwi Islander, Dean Rioli, a former popular Australian League Football star. In the desert seat of Stuart Bess Nungarrayi Price deposed the incumbent Labor minister and family relative Karl Hampton. The red centre seat of Namatjira was won by Alison Anderson, who is described as 'a traditional owner of Haasts Bluff and speaker of six native languages.' Her Labor opponent, Des Rogers, is a businessman and former regional Chairperson for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, but has fewer local connections than Anderson. In the seat of Arnhem, Malarndirri (Barbara) McCarthy, the Labor minister and former ABC news reader who

was elected unopposed in the previous election (2008) was deposed by Larisa Lee, daughter of Robert Lee, a long time activist for Aboriginal rights in northern Australia. Aikman, 'Voices of Authenticity', p. 13. On 13 March 2013, after a long factional dispute, the leader of the Northern Territory Country Liberal Party was deposed. In his place the party installed Adam Giles who is also Indigenous. Giles' elevation to the position of Chief Minister makes him the first Australian Indigenous head of government. Whilst previously supporting Giles' immediate predecessor, it was the switch of support to Giles by the four so-called 'traditional' members of parliament that enabled his elevation. Amos Aikman & Rick Wallace, 'Territory Coup Delivers Indigenous History', *The Australian* (14 March 2013), p. 1,6.

[xxxv] Robert Manne, 'Long May the Flag Fly', *The Age* (4 June 2001), p. 15.

[xxxvi] T.G.H Strehlow, 'Anthropological and Ethnological Research', in H. Shiels (ed) *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 456; Ronald M Berndt, 'Research Demanding Urgent Attention', in H. Shiels (ed), *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 443-51; Adolphus Peter Elkin, 'Before It Is Too Late', in Ronald M Berndt (ed) *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia, 1970), pp. 19-23; Marc Augé, *The Anthropological Circle*, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 88.

[xxxvii] Baldwin Spencer and Francis James Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1899), p. ix.

[xxxviii] See Anita Heiss, 'Anita Heiss,' http://www.anitaheiss.com/index.html, Accessed 8 October 2012.

[xxxix] Anita Heiss, *Am I Black Enough for You* (North Sydney: Bantam, 2012), p.1.

[xl] Heiss, *Am I Black Enough*, p. 242, (her emphasis).

[xli] Heiss, *Am I Black Enough*, p. 2, (her emphasis).

[xlii] Heiss, *Am I Black Enough*, p. 3, (her emphasis).

[xliii] The *Native Title Act 1993 (Cwlth)* Section 223 stipulates that Native Title in relation to land or waters can only be enjoyed by Aborigines, where, amongst other issues, 'i) the rights and interests are possessed under the traditional laws acknowledged, and the traditional customs observed, by the Aboriginal peoples or Torres Strait Islanders; and ii) the Aboriginal peoples or Torres Strait Islanders, by those laws and customs, have a connection with the land or waters.' National Native Title Tribunal, 'Exactly What Is Native Title', Commonwealth of Australia, http://www.nntt.gov.au/Information-about-native-title/Pages/Nativetitlerightsandinterests.aspx, Accessed 18 October 2012. Section 3 (1) of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act (1976) (Cth)* defines 'traditional Aboriginal owners', in relation to land, as being 'a local descent group of Aborigines who i) have common spiritual affiliations to a site on the land, being affiliations that place the group under a primary spiritual responsibility for that site and for that land; and ii) are entitled by Aboriginal tradition to forage as of right over that land'.

[xliv] Dallas Scott, 'The Black Steam Train: Conflict of Interest? Only for the Whites ...', http://theblacksteamtrain.blogspot.com.au, Accessed 16 August 2012.

[xlv] See for example Tjanara Goreng Goreng in Claudia Doman, 'A Peek into the Journey to Become an Aboriginal Elder', *Monitor OnLine* (University of Canberra, 31 March 2011), http://www.canberra.edu.au/monitor/2011/march/31 aboriginal-eldership, Accessed 25 August 2012. Lehman in Anton Enus, 'Aboriginal or Not'," *Insight* (Australia: SBS, 7 August 2012), Transcript: http://www.sbs.com.au/insight/episode/transcript/490/Aboriginal-or-not, Accessed 8 August 2012.

[xlvi] Maggie Walter, 'Nayri Kati: An Indigenous Quantitative Methodology', *AIATSIS Seminar Series* (Canberra: AIATSIS, 4 May 2009), http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/docs/pdfs2009/Walter040509.pdf, Accessed 5 May 2009.

[xlvii] Scott, 'The Black Steam Train: Insight—That Aboriginality Show', p. 2.

[xlviii] McMillan in Enus, 'Aboriginal or Not', p. 7.

[xlix] McMillan in Enus, 'Aboriginal or Not', p. 7.

[l] Dallas Scott, 'The Black Steam Train: Peddling the Easy Answers', (3 June 2012), http://theblacksteamtrain.blogspot.com.au/2012_06_01_archive.html, Accessed 12 September 2012.

[li] Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, pp. 2-3. Steele has won several awards for his work on race relations, including in 2004 the National Humanities Medal. The Princeton Scholar Kwame Anthony Appiah, who is also cited in this paper, was one of the 2012 recipients for the medal. (A maximum of 12 are awarded annually, to either individuals or groups). Thomas Sowell, who is cited later in this paper, won this award in 2002.

[lii] Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, p. 4, (his emphasis).

[liii] Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, p. 96.

[liv] See Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, pp. 100-01.

[lv] Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, p. 102.

[lvi] Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (New York: Metropolitan Books Henry Holt and Company, 2006), p. 73. See also Shelby Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2007), pp. 25-6.

[lvii] Discourses of discrimination through fomenting notions of belonging to a collective identity can set individuals up for heart-rending rejection. One of our former students, an Indigenous Tasmanian, having embraced the notion of discrimination (and ironically, given his socioeconomic position), not the language of disadvantage except for sometimes laying the blame for the latter at the former, headed off on a trip round Australia. He was certain that his Aboriginality and newly forged sense of belonging to a collective would be clearly evident; that the full force of his felt identity would radiate from him and Aborigines especially, Australia-wide, would instantly recognise 'a bro or cuz' (his words). Absolutely certain of this he approached an indigenous group drinking in a park in Townsville expecting to be welcomed into the cosy embrace of a shared identity and its concomitant cultural dress. 'Fuck off you white cunt', they demanded (pers. comm. 18 August 2004). This experience was relayed in tears and with genuine bewilderment.

[lviii] For example, Tjanara Goreng Goreng from the University of Canberra, variously describes herself as a 'traditional Aboriginal healer dancer and songmaker' who practices 'breath healing, channelling' (cited in Lyne Hume, 'The Dreaming in Contemporary Aboriginal Australia', in G. Harvey (ed), *Indigenous Religions: A Companion* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 131); a 'spirit healer' who summons up Wandjina, 'beautiful golden light beings' to assist with healing (cited in Katherine Kizilos, 'In the Spirit of Healing', *Age* (5 November 2005), p. 10); and more latterly, as being 'on the road to Eldership' and of having 'learnt the Foundational laws of the Tjurkurpa, one of which is the Three Laws of Respect: Respect and Honour the Self; Respect and Honour everyone else; Respect and Honour "Ngungynateea", our Mother – the Earth' (Cited in Doman, 'A Peek into the Journey'. Goreng Goreng has presented 'healing' workshops throughout Australia, the US, and elsewhere. Even the most casual acquaintance with classical Aboriginal cultures or the relevant literature would reveal the vast gulf between the 'traditional wisdom' and 'knowledge' Goreng Goreng purports to have learnt from 'Elders' and that of the cultures she has supposedly learnt from. Edmund Carpenter, one of the first anthropologists to take an enduring interest in Arctic peoples, noted with some alarm how those removed from their ancestral heritage so readily dismissed the knowledge, understanding and expertise learned by whites of 'traditional' cultural forms. The Inuit, he observed, 'takes his place on stage, side by side with the American Indian whose headdress comes from a mail-order catalogue, who learned his dances at Disneyland and picked up his philosophy from hippies. He knows no other identity, and when he is shown the real treasures of his culture, when he hears the old songs and reads the ancient words he aggressively says, "It's a lie, a white man's lie. Don't tell me who I am or who my

ancestors were. I know"'. Edmund Carpenter, *Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!* (St Albans: Granada, 1976), pp. 97-8.

lix Just to clarify, I'm not arguing here equivalence between the knowledge of white intimates of Aboriginal societies and cultures and those Aborigines who have undergone these processes of cumulative instruction.

lx Hume, 'The Dreaming in Cotemporary Aboriginal Australia', p. 129.

lxi See Pholi, 'Why I Burned'.

lxii Cited in Pearson, 'Radical Hope: Education and Equality in Australia' pp. 32, and 31-4.

lxiii Cited in Pearson, 'Education and Aspiration Keys to Membership of an Open Society', p. 3.

lxiv Maïa Ponsonnet, 'International Support for Women for Wik', *Women for Wik* (2007), http://www.whatsworking.com.au/WomenforWik/international_support.html, Accessed 11 October 2012.

lxv Maïa Ponsonnet, 'Recognising Victims without Blaming Them: A Moral Contest', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (2007), p. 44.

lxvi Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, p. 146. See also Pascal Bruckner, *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 86.

lxvii The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) that represents staff across the tertiary sector and which boasts of being a 'democratic member organisation run by your colleagues, for you!' (see NTEU, 'Membership', http://www.nteu.org.au/join, Accessed 16 October 2012), forcefully advocates 'the ugly lines of separation' through insisting that Indigenous/Aboriginal Studies Centres in Australia be staffed only by Aboriginal academics, and that non-Aboriginal staff in the employ of such centres should be located in other disciplines / departments / Schools. National and state-based NTEU staff and elected representatives concede privately that the Indigenous division of the NTEU is very powerful in respect to influencing policy (see NTEU, 'My Union: Structure', http://www.nteu.org.au/myunion/about/structure, Accessed 15 October 2012), and of the difficulties in addressing its moral authority industrially on the occasions it is necessary to do so. Like many organisations and institutions, the NTEU is out of its depth in this area, fearful, and captive to the vested interests of those convinced of their own moral superiority.

lxviii Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, p. 146.

lxix Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, p. 147.

lxx Pholi, 'Why I Burned'.

lxxi Will Sanders, 'Ideology, Evidence and Competing Principles in Australian Indigenous Affairs: From Brough to Rudd Via Pearson and the NTER', *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 45, 3 (2010), p. 318.

lxxii Pearson, 'White Guilt, Victimhood and the Quest for a Radical Centre', p. 30.

lxxiii See endnote 68.

lxxiv Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2003), p. 446.

lxxv Steele, *The Content of Our Character*, pp. 141-42.; See also Pholi, 'Why I Burned'.

lxxvi Pers. comm. 26 March 2009.

lxxvii Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*.

lxxviii Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*, p. 158.

lxxix Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*, p.158; see also p. 160.

lxxx See Pholi, 'Why I Burned'.

lxxxi Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*, p. 161. Michaels argues that this is a form of classism: 'Classism is what you're a victim of not because you're poor but because people aren't nice to you because you're poor. Its origins are on the left, in the old academic trinity (race, gender, class), and it treats economic difference along the lines of racial and sexual difference, thus identifying the problem not as the difference but as the prejudice (racism, sexism) against the difference. So, just as to be opposed to racism is by no means to be opposed to racial difference, to be opposed to classism is by no means to oppose class difference'. Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*, p. 106.

lxxxii Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*, p. 105.

lxxxiii Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity*, p. 173.

lxxxiv See Jon C Altman and Melinda Hinkson, 'Preface', in Jon C Altman and Melinda Hinkson (eds), *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia* (North Carlton: Arena, 2007), p. viii.

lxxxv Melinda Hinkson, 'Introduction: In the Name of the Child', in Jon C Altman and Melinda Hinkson (eds), *Coercive Reconciliation*, p. 5.

lxxxvi Pat Turner and Nicole Watson, 'The Trojan Horse', in Jon C Altman and Melinda Hinkson (eds), *Coercive Reconciliation*, p. 211.

lxxxvii Jon C Altman and Melinda Hinkson, (eds), *Coercive Reconciliation*, cover.

lxxxviii Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals* (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), pp. 56-7. On the issue of the psychic investment Western intellectuals have in asserting 'the wretchedness' of colonised peoples and the West's complicity in that wretchedness, see also Bruckner, *The Tyranny of Guilt*, pp. 3,34,36,39,101,15; Pearson, 'White Guilt, Victimhood and the Quest for a Radical Centre', p 30. The most egregious recent textual examples of these propensities are Sarah Maddison's *Black Politics* (Sarah Maddison, *Black Politics: Inside the Complexity of Aboriginal Political Culture* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2009), and *Beyond White Guilt* (Sarah Maddison, *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relations in Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011). For a brief review of each text see M Rolls, 'Book Review of *Black Politics: Inside the Complexity of Aboriginal Political Culture*, by Sarah Maddison, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2009, 294pp., $35 (Paperback), ISBN 9781741756982', *Journal of Australian Studies* 35, 1 (2011), pp. 125-27; Mitchell Rolls, 'Book Review of Sarah Maddison, *Beyond White Guilt: The Real Challenge for Black-White Relations in Australia*, Allen & Unwin, 2011, 245, Pb, Aud $27.99. ISBN 9781742373287', *Journal of Australian Studies* 36, 3 (2012), pp. 403-05.

lxxxix Sowell, *Black Rednecks and White Liberals*, p. 57 (his emphasis). For recent 'white liberal' examples of this see Maddison, *Black Politics* and Maddison, *Beyond White Guilt*.

Mitchell Rolls is Programme Director of Aboriginal Studies at the University of Tasmania, President of the International Australian Studies Association, and Co-Director of the interdisciplinary research centre the Centre for Colonialism and Its Aftermath (University of Tasmania). He is currently co-authoring a book examining the popular mid-twentieth century Australian magazine *Walkabout*. He has published recently in the *Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia*; *Australian Cultural History*; *Zeitschrift für Australienstudien (ZfA)*; and with Dr Murray Johnson co-authored *The Historical Dictionary of Australian Aborigines*, Scarecrow Press, 2011. His co-edited *Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to George Augustus Robinson's* Friendly Mission has just been republished by Monash University Publishing (2012). His research interests include race and representation, culture and cultural identity.