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The Treaty and Dilemmas of Anglo-Celtic Identity: from Backlash to Signatory

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I want to start off with a statement from Pauline Hanson:

‘I think the most downtrodden person in this country is the white Anglo-Saxon male.’

This paper partly arises from the bewilderment I felt when I first came across statements such as Hanson’s. Undoubtedly being a feminist gave me some additional insights into why this statement was so bizarre. However, I’m also from an Anglo-Celtic heritage and, as a citizen with ordinary powers of observation, never mind as a social scientist, this statement seemed extraordinary. I can well understand why those Anglo-Celtic males who have lost their jobs in manufacturing industry, or who are about to lose their farms, or even their middle management positions feel downtrodden. I can understand the terror of the information poor. However, what does an Anglo-Celtic ethnic identity have to do with any of these people? Had Hanson not noticed that the vast majority of politicians were not only white but had Anglo-Celtic surnames? Hadn’t she noticed that the majority of powerful people in the business world also appeared to be not merely white but Anglo-Celtic? Obviously not. Apparently she saw the world in exactly opposite ways to me and many others. If I was somewhat gobsmacked (to use a word from my heritage) by her perceptions, I could just imagine how many Indigenous Australians would feel. No wonder Marcia Langton has long used terms like ‘psychotic’ to describe the delusional attitudes and actions of significant parts of white Australia.

However, one of my key arguments in this paper is that, unfortunately, we cannot afford to dismiss these arguments just because we see them as wildly inaccurate and very bizarre. We can’t dismiss them, not only because it is always worth trying to understand where someone else’s view is coming from, but, in particular, we can’t ignore these views because they have such force today, because the mobilisation of conservative Anglo identities (many Celts must have been happy to have been left out of Hanson’s characterisations on that particular occasion) is so powerful in Australia today. At the time I opened my *Sydney Morning Herald* colour supplement and came across Hanson’s statement, I was in the middle of a project that would involve me spending four years reading John Howard’s speeches, and would eventually produce my recent book, *Governing Change: From Keating to Howard*. There were obvious connections with statements such as this by Hanson and Howard’s own attack on the power of politically correct, ‘special interests’ which, according to him, had gained power over the interests of ‘mainstream Australia’. Howard has even to some extent acknowledged this: ‘There has been I believe in the Australian community a deep seated rejection of the politically correct and distorted view of Australian history and I have played a major role myself in rejecting that very negative view of Australian history and to some extent, she’s [Hanson’s] also tapping into that.’ Indeed, the nearest Howard can come to acknowledging a history of dispossession and genocide is to refer to ‘blemishes’ in Australian history, a term which, as Judith Brett so cogently points out, condenses ‘in that small word ... the forbidden thought that it’s their blemished skin colour that has blemished our reputation.’ In this topsy-turvy mirror world inhabited

by Howard, the 'Aboriginal industry' appeared to have more power than big business. Something called the 'politically correct', cultural 'elite', which I had a terrible feeling latte-swilling readers of the *Sydney Morning Herald* colour supplement like myself belonged to, had apparently captured Keating government policy, trampling over the interests of something else called 'the mainstream'. Even worse, some members of the Labor Party seemed to be under the impression that Howard was right about who would control the Keating government agenda and that's why they had lost office in 1996.

To make matters even more difficult, critics of Hanson's or Howard's views were potentially silenced because, if they responded by saying Hanson et al's statements were totally inaccurate, they'd just confirm their 'politically correct' elitist credentials. They'd confirm they were heaping muck on ordinary people, because in this topsy-turvy world the Liberal Party was the champion of battlers. The 'fair go' had been captured by white, Anglo-Celts, (as McKenzie Wark points out so astutely in his analysis of Hanson). The dominant groups in society were now the oppressed; the disadvantaged and marginalised were the oppressors — the shameless advocates of 'special interests'. The political, media and business elites that I'd criticise for obstructing social change, for largely excluding both the non-white and the non-Anglo-Celtic, were now apparently the champions of anti-racism and anti-ethnocentrism.

I can't analyse these issues in detail here and I'm assuming this audience is more than familiar with them. However, if you want more detailed analyses see my book *Governing Change* and Andrew Markus's book, *Race: John Howard and the Remaking of Australia* and Ghassan Hage's *White Nation*.

Ghassan Hage has termed this discourse, 'the discourse of Anglo-decline', in which the privilege of Anglo-Celts is seen as being increasingly under threat and the issue becomes how to manage the 'others'. Hage is right about that. However, what I've termed myself the 'Revenge of the Mainstream' discourse is, in a sense, just as much about policing whites and Anglo-Celts as it is about managing the racial and ethnic 'other'. It is about asserting a particular form of Anglo-Celtic identity and trying to repress those Anglo-Celts with other views, that is the so-called 'politically correct'. The price of all of this was not just the reinforcement of power and privilege but the suborning other less powerful groups into racist projects. For the other side of the arguments about cultural elites was, in my view, the quite offensive assumption that articulating racism was an evocation of white Anglo working class identity, just as much as criticising racism was apparently an evocation of upper class cosmopolitanism.

So, to return to the central focus of this paper, how do you undertake a Treaty process in this topsy-turvy world? How do you get Anglo-Celts to support politicians coming to the negotiating table when the arguments about justice and injustice have been seized by the other side? And why, for that matter, focus on Australian Anglo-Celts, who will only be one of the non-Indigenous groups whose views will influence whether non-Indigenous politicians are prepared to engage in the Treaty process?

Well one reason I'm concentrating on Anglo-Celts is because of my own background as one, because I believe that Anglo-Celts have a particular responsibility, a particular obligation, to deal with their own kind. I'll leave it to those non-Indigenous Australians with non-Anglo-Celtic identities to deal with what the postcolonial form of their identity would be like. Also, I'm focusing on Anglo-Celts because Anglo-Celtic identity has already been politically mobilised. And I believe it is particularly important to deal with these issues of Anglo-Celtic identity, not just because people who claim Anglo-Celtic heritage still form the majority of Australians and therefore have to be brought the party on the Treaty process just in numerical terms (77% in the mid-eighties), but also because, let's face it, Australia was set up as a British colony. There is a sense in which every non-Indigenous settler who came here after 1789 was an invader, regardless of ethnicity or race. Those of us with British heritage have particular links with a colonial heritage to come to terms with, even those diasporic Britons, like my parents and myself, who came here in the nineteen fifties (I was a

baby). Indeed, given the sort of views still being expressed in Britain today by political leaders who seem totally incapable of reflecting upon their own imperial history of conquest, killing and subjugation, I'd argue that those of Anglo-Celtic descent living in formerly British, colonial settler societies have a special responsibility to raise issues regarding colonialism not just to the societies they live in but for the British and English themselves. So, perhaps this is a double opportunity for Australian Anglo-Celts to deal with what Judith Brett argues is one of the reasons why so many are loathe to say 'sorry' — 'the way those who emigrated to Australia mourned — or failed to mourn — the world they left behind; and the intergenerational impact of this as those cut off from their own pasts brought up their own children.'

That brings me to the issue of why I think a Treaty process is so important. One can make a number of historical arguments as to why the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples never surrendered their sovereignty and should therefore be part of Treaty negotiations between sovereign peoples. One can come up with lots of other arguments why historically a Treaty is justified and should have taken place in Australia as it did across the Tasman. Henry Reynolds and Marcia Langton have both tackled those issue of historical sovereignty and Treaties particularly well. However, there are also very pressing, contemporary, reasons why a Treaty process is necessary, particularly because colonialism in Australia is an ongoing process. As Howard's Wik legislation showed, we are still working out the colonial settlement. Non-Indigenous Australia is still trying to impose colonial relations on Indigenous Australia. That is the most important reason why a Treaty process is still as relevant today as it was in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

However, I'm not an expert on Indigenous politics and I'm not here today to discuss the exact content of the Treaty, although I think Marcia Langton and Geoff Clark have both set out what some of the key issues up for negotiation need to be, but I do want to argue that the process of Treaty-making is an essential part of the process of reconciliation. And I am somewhat of an expert on white Australian politics. There are useful things I can say about that. Because, I think the problems in getting a Treaty up, in whatever form/s, will be just immense. In the rest of this paper I want to talk more about one reason why and about some strategies for trying to do something about it.

I'm concentrating on the problem of Anglo-Celtic identity because I want to make the point that what Treaty negotiations are up against is not just the issue of the power of colonial invaders, including mining companies and pastoralists; not just the power of subsequent generations of colonial invaders in denial who don't want to acknowledge who they are or what non-Indigenous Australians are all still benefitting from — namely Aboriginal and Islander dispossession — but, even more difficult, a dominant ethnic group whose identity is in crisis. And that is one more reason why the Treaty process will be such a difficult one. The Treaty process will not just raise issues of national identity, and of whether it involves negotiations between different nations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous ones, but it will raise issues for the identity of groups within the non-Indigenous population and none more so than the Anglo-Celts.

Some of you may be wondering why I've begun my overheads with some quotations from contemporary British politicians.

There always used to be something very un-British about trying to define who the British were. Perhaps that is because we were so sure of ourselves that we were mildly embarrassed to spell it out. Were we not the people who could never be conquered, whose empire had brought civilisation to far-off lands, whose navy kept the sea open, and whose Parliament was the mother of all Parliaments?' (William Hague, Conservative Party Leader)

I want the next century to be one where Britain's worth is measured not in how much of the globe it owns or conquers, but measured by the achievements of its citizens, by the sort of people we want to become, the sort of society we choose to create.' (Tony Blair, Prime Minister)

Well, obviously I'm giving you some examples of the degree to which the colonial mother culture doesn't wish to reflect on legacies of colonialism either. Even more to the point, Hague and Blair's statements are part of a British debate over the crisis in British and English identity. Indeed, in recent years there has been an explosion of popular journalism and writing discussing 'Britishness' and 'Englishness'. Britishness and Englishness have become key issues in the race debate which is currently happening during the British election, a debate which sometimes, incidentally, uses Howard-type terminology like 'the mainstream'. (This is not a coincidence given the number of Australians working on the Conservative campaign, Hague's visit to Australia to study how to defeat a sitting labor government and Howard's address to the 2000 Conservative Party conference by video-link).

Similarly, in Australia in recent years, there has been considerable interest in issues of Anglo-Celtic identity. We have seen the publication of Geoffrey Partington's, *The Australian Nation: Its British and Irish Roots*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997) and the release of Miriam Dixson, *The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-celts and Identity - 1788 to the Present*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999) as well as books which address the issue of Anglo-Celtic Australian identity through the Race Debate of the late nineties, for example Ghassan Hage's *White Nation*, (Pluto, Australia 1998) or Jon Stratton's *Race Daze: Australia in Identity Crisis*, (Pluto, Australia, 1998). These are also issues I also discuss in my recent book *Governing Change* (University of Queensland Press, 2000).

The explosion of interest in British/English/Anglo-Celtic identity reflects the increasing challenges facing privileged, often previously, largely unquestioned identities. After all, British identity is having to be reconstructed in the face of rapid social, economic and technological change, including the effects of globalisation, being part of the European Union, political devolution and the increasingly multi-racial nature of Britain today. In Australia, formal colonial ties with Britain are largely broken (despite relics like the monarchy) and colonial settler and Indigenous Australians are facing the legacies of invasion and dispossession. Australians are also facing the impact of globalisation and rapid social, economic and technological change. Australia is developing closer ties with its Asian and Pacific neighbours; and massive levels of post-war migration have made Australia an unusually multicultural society, challenging (but not removing) Anglo-Celtic dominance. Even in the 1960s, 51% of migrants to Australia were born in the United Kingdom and Ireland, by the 1990s only 15% of migrants were born in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Given that concepts of Britishness and Englishness are under challenge in Britain itself, it is hardly surprising that Australians of Anglo-Celtic origin or descent face even more complex issues of identity. Indeed, social geographer Doreen Massey has pointed out that, for numerous reasons to do with social and economic change, inhabitants of first world countries are now facing forms of insecurity and disorientation once predominantly faced by the colonised or marginalised groups within first world society. (Obviously, the first world experiences aren't generally equivalent to the genocide and dispossession faced by Indigenous Australians).

So I'm arguing that the sort of mobilisation of conservative, traditional, racist Anglo-Celtic identity that we have seen in Australia is part of a broader crisis for dominant ethnic identities internationally. I'm now going to argue that, in order to try to work out some ways of de-mobilising those traditional identities, we have to look a little more at exactly what is happening. And it is here, I think that William Hague's extraordinary statement gives us a clue. Let us consider Hague's statement in depth:

There always used to be something very un-British about trying to define who the British were. Perhaps that is because we were so sure of ourselves that we were mildly embarrassed to spell it out. Were we not the people who could never be conquered, whose empire had brought civilisation to far-off lands, whose navy kept the sea open, and whose Parliament was the mother of all Parliaments?

Hague's arguments are obviously important because of the complete lack of reflection on what colonialism meant for those who were subjugated, killed and dispossessed. His arguments are also important because of what he implies about the silences in British identity. Hague virtually admits that conceptions of Britishness rarely needed to be articulated because of the assumed superiority of the British. This is also why Englishness was rarely articulated. If conceptions of Britishness did not need to be spelled out, then even less did the English identity that was so often dominant within it. However, such silence does become a problem for the British when the assumed dominance begins to be challenged, even undermined. When British identity is meant to become more racially inclusive, then silence becomes a lack and a grievance. Then it becomes a problem that there is no clear British or English identity separate from the assertion of racial and ethnic privilege that was one of its defining features. In this sense, challenging superiority can be experienced as robbing the British or English of their identity. But surely the question then becomes how to develop a sense of British or English identity that is not dependent upon it being superior. And we should ask the same question for Australian Anglo-Celtic identity. It's the very old question for Australian Anglo-Celts of how we address the 'whispering in our hearts', of how we address the essential moral dilemmas upon which the Australian nation is founded.

Now, I realise that suggesting that it is important to encourage other forms of Anglo-Celtic identity that are not based on subordination and superiority, forms of Anglo-Celtic identity that see Anglo-Celts as one ethnic groups among others in Australian society, that do not see Anglo-Celtic 'whiteness' as synonymous with national identity or Australian core values is a very risky strategy. I recognise that any mobilisation of Anglo-Celtic identity is potentially very dangerous but my argument would be that it has already been mobilised with disastrous results. I don't want Pauline Hanson or John Howard articulating my identity. I'd prefer not to have an identity based on psychotic denial. I don't want an identity that is haunted by shameful silence and forbidden thoughts. I'd prefer not to have an identity based around myths of peaceful settlement and the pioneering spirit. I don't want a sense of ethnic identity that somehow manages to be both exclusively heterosexual and leave out women. I don't want to have to continually evoke Gallipoli to define my identity. Bob Hawke critiqued Howard's refusal to take any responsibility for the actions of past generations by saying we weren't at Gallipoli either but we identify with that. The point is that for Howard 'we' were, or an idealised youthful masculine Anglo-Celtic digger was. That is precisely why Gallipoli has such a nostalgic place for the Prime Minister in Anglo-Celtic longing and narratives of (masculine) nationhood.

I want to argue that politicians who are serious about reconciliation need to engage with conceptions of Anglo-Celtic identity and articulate more positive ones — the other forms of Anglo-Celtic identity that have always been whispering in the background and have sometimes been articulated more loudly than others. I would prefer, on those occasions when amongst my many, hybrid identities, I identify as an Australian Anglo-Celt to call on articulations of Anglo-Celtic identity that say we are the Anglo-Celts prepared to face colonial legacies and ongoing injustices and embrace reconciliation. We are the Anglo-Celts who support the national government being part of the Treaty-making process. We are the Anglo-Celts who showed the British a thing or two about facing up to the legacies of colonialism. We are the Anglo-Celts who could see ourselves as one ethnicity amongst many who have contributed to the development of Australian society. I would emphasise that my view here is very different from that of commentators such as Miriam Dixson, who, despite her support for diversity, still tends to privilege Anglo-Celtic identity when defining Australian 'core-values'. My argument would be that Australian core values, whatever they are, should not be equated with Anglo-Celtic identity.

As Paul Keating pointed out years ago, Australian political values can and should include the very support for diversity that comes from years of multicultural migration. As he also pointed out, the values of parliamentary democracy (which Howard believes we took from Britain) were given a particularly Australian slant as, many years before the British, we introduced measures such as universal male and female suffrage, the secret ballot, payment for MPs. Above all, if Indigenous and

non-Indigenous Australians can be successful in reconciliation and Treaty negotiations, we really will, finally, be forging a true democracy and truly inclusive values — ones that are very different from anything that can be claimed to be traditionally English or British. In short, the forms of Anglo-Celtic identity I am talking about are precisely ones that DO NOT equate Australian values, or national identity with Anglo-Celtic identity and break with colonialism.

I realise that to many this may seem incredibly naive, as though it is possible to somehow overcome the obvious on-going numerical and cultural dominance of Anglo-Celts in Australian society. Realistically, I'd have to say that there is considerable point to that criticism and I'm not overly sanguine about how much can be achieved. Australian Anglo-Celts are the heirs of empire and of cultural dominance within Australian society. Anglo-Celtic whiteness has been the definitive whiteness. It is very hard, if not impossible, for any Anglo-Celt, including myself, to totally escape that heritage and its influence on the diverse ways in which we see the world. However, I do argue for the need to attempt to at least engage with, and try to reduce, some of the worst mobilisations of contemporary Anglo-Celtic identity. We can do better than John Howard, Pauline Hanson and even Paul Keating. Furthermore some of us Anglo-Celts have experiences of being in subordinate positions through other identities, through being female, male blue collar working class made redundant by globalisation, being gay or lesbian. They are in no way equivalent to being an Indigenous person whose country is occupied, but they can give insights into what it feels like to be in a subordinate position. And just as feminists facing sexism expect men to take some responsibility for their own, just as gays and lesbians facing homophobia expect heterosexuals to take some responsibility for their own, so Anglo-Celts should take primary responsibility for their own (and 'white' Australians generally for other 'white' Australians). Isn't this what Anglo-Celts who went on freedom rides in the sixties or, more recently, sign sorry books or walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge in reconciliation walks are already doing....?

I'm also conscious of the fact that if we don't name Anglo-Celtic identity, it remains the unspoken, unarticulated dominant universal. The problem here is very similar to the problem with whiteness itself, which is hardly surprising given that Anglo-Celtic identity is the most influential form of whiteness in our society. I'm reminded here of Marcia Langton's analysis of Australian whiteness, drawing on Richard Dyer:

.... how can we explain why those Australians who vote for the coalition parties and their policies, to say nothing of voting for One Nation, still, at the end of the twentieth century hold views characteristic of those held by the makers of the Australian constitution a century ago? It is, I propose, because those white Australians do not see themselves as having a 'race'. As Richard Dyer ... puts it so succinctly: 'As long as race is something only applied to non-white people, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people'. He argues that there is 'no more powerful position than that of being 'just' human'. The human can speak for all humanity, whereas the raced can only speak for their race. But if we see, and speak of, whites as raced, we 'dislodge them/us from the position of power' and undercut the authority with which whites speak and act on the world.

Seen in this way, articulating Anglo-Celticness can be a way of undermining its authority. However, I want to emphasise that the primary responsibility for handling the dysfunctional features of versions of Anglo-Celtic identity, in its racist forms, is obviously the responsibility of Anglo-Celtic Australians themselves. It certainly isn't the responsibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to look after the tortured, not to say torturous, psyche of the invader.

Yet another possible objection to encouraging other forms of Anglo-Celtic identity is that articulating any identity necessarily involves exclusion and relations of domination and subordination. I agree that this can be a risk. However, I argue in my book *Governing Change* that

this argument relies to some extent on a form of de Saussurean linguistic reductionism and that the way in which dominant and subordinate identities are formed is actually far more complex than this. In particular, I argue that this view cannot adequately explain the ways in which some identities achieve their dominance through forms of incorporation and assimilation that are very evident in Australian party political discourse — forms of dominance and subordination that rely on an assumed and un-articulated universal. It is those discourses that I am interested in challenging here and, while there are risks of exclusion, leaving conservative, racist articulations of Anglo-Celtic identity unchallenged seems far more dangerous to me.

It therefore seems to me that even in the case of politicians such as Paul Keating we need to explore who the ‘we’ is in his discourse. In one sense, it is obvious that, in the quote below, Keating is referring to all non-Indigenous Australians and, I’ve argued earlier, that that is correct when looking at the picture overall (while not denying the almost total dominance of white colonial settlers/invaders over other non-Indigenous ‘settlers’). In another sense, surely the ‘we’ particularly refers to Anglo-Celts, given Keating’s Irish heritage:

It was we who did the dispossession. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice.’

...it might help us if we non-Aboriginal Australians imagined ourselves dispossessed of land we had lived on for fifty thousand years — and then imagined us being told that it had never been ours. Imagine if ours was the oldest culture in the world and we were told that it was worthless. Imagine if we had resisted this settlement, suffered and died in defense of our land, and then were told in history books that we had given up without a fight...Imagine if our spiritual life was denied and ridiculed. Imagine if we had suffered the injustice and then were blamed for it. It seems to me that if we can imagine the injustice we can imagine its opposite.

Faced with conservative and racist versions of Anglo-Celtic identity, we also need to imagine another one. Isn’t this what Keating himself partly represented, however inadequately and whatever his deficiencies (and those who had to compromise over his Native Title legislation, and even his own Minister, Tickner, seem to be well aware of what those deficiencies were). Yet, part of the problem is that Keating did not explicitly address the issue of Anglo-Celtic identity. He made lots of statements about forging an inclusive national identity, he made lots of statements about valuing the contributions of diverse social groups, that is the ‘other’, but he did not address the issue of Anglo or Celtic identity in any detail, other than occasional references to his Irish heritage. I think this is a problem and one that reveals that, even in Keating’s case, Anglo-Celtic identity was the unspoken, assumed identity that didn’t need to be specifically mentioned because it was already there, occupying the centre.

In my view, we won’t have a properly multicultural society until Anglo-Celtic identity is recognised as itself being an ethnic identity; as being one ethnic identity amongst others. We won’t have a Treaty process until the majority of Anglo-Celts subscribe to more amenable forms of Anglo-Celtic identity. If we are going to have a Treaty, the politicians of the left need to engage with and attempt to mobilise Anglo-Celtic identity, not leave that mobilisation to the forces of reaction and racism. Beasley has made some very good speeches on issues like The Stolen Generations but seems very cautious when it comes to many other Indigenous issues, particularly the Treaty process. Ideally, politicians of the right would be prepared to do that too, as older Liberal statesmen such as Malcolm Fraser have attempted to do. (I would remind you that Liberal Party attitudes on Indigenous issues have hardened greatly over the years, as even ex-Labor Ministers such as Tickner acknowledge).

Conclusion

So, I'm arguing that all parties need to take so-called 'mainstream' identities such as Britishness, Englishness or Anglo-Celtic identity seriously. There are reasons why many groups of people, including the powerful, can feel insecure in the modern world. Even Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, who is a major critic of English racism, acknowledges that the English feel 'lost' and argues for the need to construct a more positive English identity. The problem is that, precisely because of their powerful position, mainstream identities often did not have to be spelled out. They were the assumed 'universal' that everyone else was meant to aim to be like and be assimilated into. Consequently, when their (largely) unquestioned superiority is challenged, so is a large part of what traditionally constituted them. In these circumstances, a changing identity can easily be experienced as a loss of identity (and this insecurity can be heightened if challenges to other forms of identity, such as class or masculine identity, are being experienced as well). It then becomes even easier to mobilise racist forms of this identity. The challenge for politicians is to try to encourage a positive sense of identity for traditionally powerful ethnic groups that is not dependent upon a sense of racial or ethnic superiority.

Above all, Australian (and British) politicians need to tackle an imperial past. Australian politicians have to engage with the legacies of Australia's colonial settler status, including issues of reconciliation. (They must also deal with the increasing racial and ethnic diversity in our settler society). However, politicians also need to give those Australians of Anglo-Celtic origin a sense of pride in the useful contributions which their ethnic group has made, and can continue to make, to Australian society, at the same time as encouraging them to accept that they can no longer be **the** privileged ethnic group that determines Australian identity and shapes/controls Australian society. In particular, supporting the Treaty process needs to be turned into a positive aspect of Anglo-Celtic identity; a sign of the courage and determination of Australian Anglo-Celts to face up to, and at least partially right, the colonial settler injustices of the past and the present. I hope I've made it clear that I am well aware of the dangers of engaging with and articulating Anglo-Celtic identity, but if we don't then, in my assessment at least, the Treaty process has little chance of success.

Discussion Session

Geoff Gray: I enjoyed that paper, Carol, and I thought you raised some really good issues. But I am still confused as to what this Anglo-Celtic identity is, and how, in a sense, you identify that in Australia as an Australian identity, and the conflation of that with whiteness, which I think broadens out the problem [of an?] Anglo-Celtic white Australian identity. I wonder if you would care to [comment on that?]

Carol Johnson: I think those are good issues. It is particularly a problem that in this paper mainly concentrates on what has been happening in the discourse of politicians, which does not necessarily reflect what has been happening in wider Australia.

I guess my position would be this: Anglo-Celtic identity in Australia is the dominant form of whiteness. It has been, if you like, the litmus test for whiteness. Indeed, historically in Australia there have been periods of time when, for example, Greeks and Italians were not considered to be white, when Turks were not considered to be white. This is one of the issues, that the people who were indisputably considered to be white were the Anglo-Celts. So it has been very important in deciding what whiteness is in our country, but of course we know that whiteness is a constructed category.

The other issue is that in some ways anyone who came to this country after the point of invasion is an invader, regardless of whether they are Anglo-Celtic or Italian or Greek or Lebanese or whatever. Anglo-Celts might have a particular relationship historically to the process of British colonialism, but obviously the ranks of the invaders are much larger than the Anglo-Celts. In my view they would include people who came long after the 18th century. My parents came in the 1950s, and I came in the 1950s as a baby, but we are still benefiting from that legacy of dispossession, aren't we?

In a way I feel that all I have any right to talk to is what form the, if you like, post-colonial version of Anglo-Celtic identity might take, if such a thing is possible. I think that people from other non-Indigenous ethnic groups need to work out what their forms of post-colonial identity would take. That is, in a way, another project. While I think that is a very important project and it will also influence the Treaty process, the crucial ethnic identity in Australia today is the Anglo-Celtic one, and particularly the way it has been mobilised, in my view, by both Hanson and Howard.

Richard Davis: Just a couple of points: I am interested that you raised William Hague and Tony Blair. The English historian, who once used the term the ‘mongrel English nation’ had a far less clear idea about what Englishness consisted of; since the middle of the nineteenth century it is quite recognised, this kind of mixed immigrant nature of the English population. It is interesting to note that someone like Hague or Blair, who represents I guess in a class-based society fairly elite interests, not surprising would claim a clear sense of whiteness.

The other point is that 100 years ago, quite literally, very similar debates on this occurred in Australia and in America about the threat that colonised people posed to developing nations. It was partly because Black Americans were gaining a certain amount of rights. They were, in demographic terms, the majority in the South. They posed a great threat to the white institutions in the South. There is a similar debate starting to occur in Australia and other parts of the colonised world. So the threat to whiteness, the threat to the nation, has a precedent and is not dissimilar, although for different reasons, to what was occurring 100 years ago in exactly the same countries.

Carol Johnson: Indeed you could go further than that and say that the whole idea of Australia was shot through with the need to distance ourselves from Asia. But that has always been a theme in Australian political history. You are absolutely right. I think what has made it stronger now is the fact, although the European empires have declined, globalisation means that various Asian and other economies, despite the Asian meltdown, are now seen as being a far more serious threat to the West than they were previously. I think in the Australian case what has happened is that, to state the obvious, the White Australia policy has ended. (When you look sometimes at the detention camps in Western Australia you wonder whether it has ended and you wonder whether there are particularly strange definitions of whiteness is at work again today, but basically the White Australia Policy per se has ended.) We now have migration from very diverse ethnic groups—I have not got the precise figures on me – but now a very small minority of the current migrant intake that is from Britain, whereas even about 20 years ago it still was about 55 per cent from England. So there are extra, additional challenges, although I agree that the discourse is an extremely old one.

Marian Sawyer: That was really interesting, Carol, and this whole story about the attempt to mobilise an Anglo-Celtic identity is an interesting feature of current conservative politics. But I am not sure whether it really has much scope in terms of a coherent identity. The coherence of that kind of British race did not rest on the deeds of the Empire, the idea that Australians were rejuvenating the British race and all that sort of stuff. When you have not got the Empire, as you have suggested, there is not much coherence, as you can indeed see in the United Kingdom. The English identity, all those St George crosses flying everywhere now as a response to the upsurge of Scottish identity, Welsh identity, Manx identity, Cornish identity, Pictish identity – all of these things are threatening, as you suggest, a dominant cultural identity. That brings me to my question: what is the future of a non-ethnicised national identity, one based on Donald Horne’s ‘civic culture’, those culture values, but non-ethnicised, because I do not see much future in any kind of Anglo-Celtic identity?

Carol Johnson: I guess my response to the first part of your question would be that I do not think that identities have to necessarily be coherent to work. Indeed if you think of John Howard’s mobilisation of Anglo-Celtic identity prior to the 1996 election, it was very rarely made explicit. All that needed to be there was references to political correctness, the mainstream, Aboriginal industry, various other key words. They were ways of mobilising particular voters without necessarily coherently and explicitly spelling out the terms of what this meant.

It is interesting that you say, with the links to Britain too, that identity is in decline, which I am sure

it is. On the other hand, it interested me the other day when Bob Hawke said in the Labor Party address, in effect: 'How come we're not prepared to take responsibility for the Stolen Generations but we still see the past generations at Gallipoli as shaping our identity? We weren't at Gallipoli, just as we personally may not have been involved in stealing Aboriginal children.' My response to that would be that the reason why Gallipoli is being invoked so much is precisely that 'we' were there, and that Gallipoli is partly being invoked as a story of Anglo-Celtic identity. Who was at Gallipoli? It was the predecessors of the major postwar immigration Australia that was at Gallipoli. It was also, of course, a male Australia and various other things. So I would argue that that is being invoked in some really interesting ways now.

In terms of the future of values that are not ethnicised—despite my talking a lot about Anglo-Celtic ethnicity—, in a strange way that is precisely what I am arguing for when I say that core values should not be identified with Anglo-Celtic ethnicity. Indeed, Paul Keating had some interesting comments when talking about the relationship with Britain. He said in effect, 'Some people say we got our parliamentary democracy straight from Britain. Well, we might have got parliamentary democracy from Britain but of course we also introduced universal suffrage for both men and women, payment for politicians and a secret ballot, many, many years before the British did.' So our parliamentary values and our form of parliamentary democracy were ones that we developed ourselves, with a bit of input from other places including the United States.

Talking about what Australian core values would be, he said, 'Well, one of the Australian core values is' – maybe he was being a bit optimistic in that, and should have said 'should be' – supporting diversity and that comes precisely from our history of immigration and ethnicities that are living together.

When you look at arguments like this, you can begin to see what were the national values and a national identity that were not related to particular ethnic groups. Obviously all these identities are constructed. I am not arguing that they have some sort of essentialist meaning; they are all constructed. But I guess my problem is that, a bit like the issue of whiteness in Marcia Langton's quotation, I just think that even if we do not articulate Anglo-Celtic identity it is very much still there as the assumed universal. In a way my argument would be that to get beyond these ethnic identities you almost have to articulate them first.

Barry Hindess: Thanks, Carol. I found that very thought-provoking, especially in my present situation as someone who is very much an Anglo by background and education and who has been working recently on British colonial history, not just in Australia but the Empire more generally. It is the kind of work that makes me, frankly, extremely uncomfortable with assuming an Anglo identity. I would, in fact, rather not have to do that. (As often as possible I pretend that I am something else, something I am more comfortable with than actually pushing my own Anglo-ness.)

Part of looking at the history of British colonialism brings up some slightly tangential reflections on Englishness. One reflection would be in response to your question, 'If you take away the Empire, what is left?' If you take away the Empire, what is left is at least three things I can think of, for the English at least. One is Europe, which is not available to Australia but is very much available to Britain. Another is the West, which is still available to us in Australia. And a third is something which I picked up from some British historian some time ago, the idea of the 'imperialism of free trade'. When the term was initially coined, it was designed to refer to the British Empire during part of the 19th century, during a period when the British state was not particularly keen on further imperial expansion—it had something else going forward. But the term has been introduced more recently to refer to the 'new world order' following the Second World War, the world order in which the United States is the dominant power and in which the Brits—and the Australians, indeed—can see themselves playing a part, a minor part but nevertheless they are still part of this order, in some way.

All of those lamenting that their part of the empire in one sense has gone still carry with them a sense of our superiority over various others. So it seems to me that there are a whole range of

identities are available to the Anglos, the Anglo-Celts and a variety of other Westerners and Europeans to cope with the loss of empire. And most of the ones that are available in this present world are ones which still evoke this notion of our superiority over other races.

That brings me to a second, and I hope shorter, comment. You said in your talk, I think absolutely rightly, that colonialism is ongoing. I think that quite clearly, in teasing out the significance of that idea, one way it is ongoing is in the Australian Constitution, and indeed in the constitution of other Western societies. It is ongoing in the constitutional assumption which Jim Tully designates as the 'empire of uniformity', in the assumption that in a civilised society there will be a uniform relationship between citizens and the state of which they are a part, which of course implies that those who do not fall into that uniform [attitude?] and who seek a different kind of relationship will be seen not simply as difficult but as in some significant respects lesser.

The reason I think those two kinds of concerns go together is that the ongoing use of the term 'Western culture', especially, is easily tied in to the sense of Anglo or Anglo-Celtic identity. But it also can be separated from it in some way, so that one could, indeed, buy into a kind of broader European multiculturalism, dissociating oneself from Anglo-ness but still buying into the other kind of identities assumed within the frame of the Constitution. And particularly when the issues you are focusing on are actually even worse, more complex, than your talk was suggesting.

Carol Johnson: Yes, they are worse and more complex than my talk suggested. Part of that is the problem of having to give papers in 40 minutes. I tried to hint that I am aware of what some of the dangers are, and I am certainly not trying to suggest that just by getting rid of those particular forms of British identity involving the Empire you somehow get rid of the forms of superiority. In fact, I have written a paper about Blair's attempt to establish what I call a 'virtual empire' by saying in effect, 'Britain is going to be at the cutting edge of new information technology and we are once again going to lead the world through new information technology.'

Those forms are evident, and he specifically situates them in the context of decline of empire, the growth of the United States, China and other countries, saying in effect, 'But this is where our British attributes of inventiveness can come to the fore. Just as we started the Industrial Revolution, so the work of Babbage and Turing started the information revolution and we will lead the world again.' So those tendencies are very much still there, I totally agree.

I am also sympathetic to your argument that often one would rather not identify one's ethnic background as Anglo. There are multiple ways in which I identify at various times and in different situations, but there comes a point when, if I am asked what my ethnic background is, then I will say, 'Actually, I was born in England.' That might have particular meanings for me too, because I come from the north of England, a very industrial area. But it seems to me that if you do not have some sort of ethnic identity, what is your identity? Do you just say, 'I am Australian'? Are you saying, in effect, 'Well, you're a Greek Australian,' 'You're an Italian Australian,' 'You're a Lebanese Australian,' and 'I'm just Australian'? That is the dilemma of what the situation is when you do not articulate some sort of ethnic identity, however ambiguous you feel about it. You can end up in a situation where you are the unspoken, assumed universal, rather than saying, 'Oh, you're a Greek Australian. Yes, I'm an Anglo-Celtic Australian.' That is one of the issues I am trying to address, but more importantly I am trying to address the fact that a significant section of the voting population seems to have been influenced by arguments about special interests, about Anglo-Celts being discriminated against by these special interests that are getting benefits that they are not.

There are all sorts of arguments you could have about that, but it seems to me that you have to engage with those things and to say, 'Well look, actually the Treaty process is not going to be bad for Anglo-Celts.' One could also say that, if you are involved in a Treaty process, that is actually saying that Australian Anglo-Celts are prepared to face up to issues of colonialism.

I must admit to being somewhat hesitant about some of these arguments, seeing this in some ways as a work-in-progress paper, because I do see the dilemmas as being enormous. Just as I see the risks of vacating the ground to others as being even greater.

Ellie Gilbert: I think it is also really important to look at the proper identity of the Aboriginal nations that you are talking in about the Treaty process, because this whole thing of us getting all channeled into the one Treaty which is totally denying the true identity of all these hundreds of nations who have their own laws. Unless this process is going to let that law system breathe again, it is just [inaudible]. I have a problem with the current Treaty movement because through the '80s I was so involved with Kevin on the grassroots one and then all of a sudden when the Walk across the Bridge is happening, everybody's got a Treaty sticker on. That's when even Evelyn Scott went public and talked about how the brothers had gone behind her back.

What happened was the multinational companies, the pastoralists and the right wing are now pushing the Treaty process. I don't think most people are aware of that. So it is what you called the imperialism of free trade. That is what is pushing this Treaty process at the moment. It is all written up in an article in the *Financial Review* on 31 March 2000, about the Bennelong 'secret society', naming players including Patrick Dodson as an architect, Ian Tuxworth and everyone. It is the way that the multinationals and the pastoralists can get out of the native title process. Apart from the Act itself, the actual native title as it was accepted in *Mabo* is a law and a right and a title prior to British law and Australian law. And this is the real issue that we are dealing with. All this other stuff is absolute smokescreen. The real issue is that what is called native title is a superior title to anything that Britain and Australia can claim. Ultimately when proper recognition is given the Indigenous nations, it is going to be the non-Aboriginal Australians who have to come to Aboriginal Australia to negotiate their right to be here.

I was at the HREOC racism summit last week when Marcia put up the statistics that the Commission was working on. There could be a million Aboriginal people in Australia by the year 2010, because of a high rate of identification. So if you accept a doubling time of 10 years, which it is in some areas, it is only 50 years before the black-white population is 50:50. If the doubling time is 20 years, it is only 100 years. There will not be a way that the so-called white Anglo-Celts are going to maintain their superiority. I really think that notion of superiority has to be dismantled to show that it was an absolutely false premise that led to all this destruction around the world.

So I do not think it is something that has to be—in spite of what you are trying to say—gathered up and made into something. I think it is worth dismantling its power, because we are still living under a white supremacy power. In fact in Canberra they are trying to take children away. It is happening today. We have had an instance within the last two months, a concerted effort between housing, the police and welfare officers. It was only because someone was there to actually front the police and say, 'No, you're not taking those children' that it didn't happen. We are surrounded right now by a genocidal society. I think that people are waking up to ask, 'Why is it that we haven't got a law against genocide? Why is it that Howard's chief legal adviser says we deliberately don't have a law against genocide?' They know what the population is going to do, and they're flat out. That's why everyone is locked up and we've got all these deaths occurring. They're flat out trying to contain it till next time.

Carol Johnson: Thanks for that question. That was very useful. I take your point about the Treaty process. I am certainly not an expert on the history of treaties, but it seems to me that there are a number of different histories of how issues of the Treaty come up, and it goes back a very long time and it has come up from different Aboriginal peoples in different contexts. Certainly that is the account that Marcia Langton gives of it, for example, and Geoff Clark to some extent too. I certainly think there are issues about what form of Treaty you want to have, and acknowledge that even if you see it as being a Treaty between Aboriginal Australia and non-Indigenous Australia, as two nations, that then obviously opens the issue of seeing Aboriginal Australia as one nation rather than as a large number of Aboriginal peoples. So I acknowledge that those are major problems.

At the same time, it seems to me that lots of conservative forces in Australian society are very challenged by the concept of a Treaty. I will certainly have a look at that *Financial Review* article, which I haven't seen, I must admit, but I will follow it up. You can certainly see that in Howard's

arguments, that if you begin the Treaty process then it is acknowledging that Aboriginal sovereignty still exists, and that it was not abolished. I think because of that it is an important issue still to pursue.

In terms of trying to get rid of the idea of Anglo-Celtic dominance and superiority, yes, I totally agree with you that I think that is a job for everyone to do, from their various perspectives. I guess as an Anglo-Celt, though, I do feel a particular responsibility. If I am sitting in a room and a man in that room makes a particularly sexist and obnoxious comment, then I often won't immediately rip in; I'll sit and wait to see if the other men are going to say something about it, whether they are going to do something about one of their own. I guess as an Anglo-Celt I feel a bit in that position too, that we can't sit there and wait for other people to say, 'That's rubbish, that's offensive,' or whatever. We actually need to be in there contesting it ourselves. That is one of the points that I was trying to make. One of the reasons we might want to be in there contesting it ourselves is in a way self-interest. In the last few years one has felt particularly ashamed to be an Anglo-Celtic Australian, as indeed one has felt particularly ashamed to be a white Australian as the United Nations comes out condemning us. I think we all have a stake in trying to get a better outcome in some way.

[Qb]: My comment relates back to one made about the various interpretations, particularly from Britain's point of view. I was wondering why the Commonwealth was left out here. Was that seen as a continuation of empire? Certainly as far as Howard seems to be concerned, this is one way of reinforcing that image that he seems to have. One of the most interesting things – and it is not a question so much as a bit of information – the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet at the moment is looking at the possibility of streaming entrants to the country as Commonwealth citizens and 'other ranks'.

Carol Johnson: Is that right? That's come up again?

[Qb] It's come up again, and I just thought people ought to be aware that this is at least in the discussion stage.

Carol Johnson: That is very interesting. I would have thought it also would have had racial effects that Howard possibly has not actually come to terms with, which would be very interesting. It makes you wonder what he perceives the Commonwealth to be. Does he still perceive the Commonwealth to be white?

I spent some time in England doing research recently and I went through a whole lot of statements that Howard had made about relationships with Britain, and he certainly still sees it in very traditional terms. I am sure that part of his emphasis on the Commonwealth is that, but also I suppose he might see it as being a convenient way of trying to deal with refugees who are coming from the Middle East at present. But if you look at immigration to Britain, using some versions of Commonwealth citizenship, then of course it is not going to be Zimbabwean white farmers who necessarily will be pouring into Australia; it might be African Caribbean people and people from the Subcontinent, which would be very interesting to see Howard and Ruddock deal with. But that is extraordinary.

Robert Janssen: I think this discussion is very useful for this seminar series, that a Treaty debate can tend to focus entirely on questions of Aboriginal rights and that we need to look at the other side of who is going to negotiate this Treaty.

My recent experience tends to provide a bit of evidence that the Anglo-Celtic identity—and as with you I do not see that as a coherent sort of thing but rather a dominant cultural influence in Australia – is not very permeable, in a sense that Australian representation through the Parliament, whoever represents the state and the Crown, seems to be quite Anglo-Celtic just by privilege in terms of who gets jobs. That sort of identity is not very permeable, in that we have consistently failed to engage in Asia because we are hopeless at it; we have consistently failed to appreciate Indigenous experience, because we don't understand it. And the Anglo-Celtic identity is incapable of understanding quite diverse cultures, whether Asian or Indigenous.

That concerns me in a sense that if the Treaty comes down to a situation of the state, represented by the parliament – probably represented by the executive – I fear that they are not capable of the negotiation with Aboriginal nations . They are not able to engage in that negotiation. They will be able to engage in a debate where they want to win or they want to subjugate cultures; they are not able to negotiate in a sense of giving and taking something. I just wonder whether your reflections on this, much more sophisticated than mine, have anything that might reflect on the permeability of the dominant culture.

Carol Johnson: Certainly the experience of recent years suggests that it is not very permeable. I take your point about who is going to be doing the negotiation for the Australian government. I assume that this is partly the problem that was worrying Geoff Clark when he made a call to set up some sort of Treaty Commission that would have a wider representation and at least be able to come up with some recommendations. But of course then what the force of those recommendations would have, I am not sure about.

It seems to me that Australian society can do a lot better than it has. The Canadians are streaks ahead of us at the moment, whatever their problems. Other societies have been able to say sorry on all sorts of issues in ways that we can't. I think there will be enormous problems in the Treaty process, but it is something that we still have to attempt to do. I am not sure how you deal with that issue of who is going to be negotiating things from the government's point of view. You look at the senior echelons of the Public Service, you look at the nature of parliament itself, and it is not a very good picture.

Lisa Strelein: If there are no other questions, Carol, do you want to say anything else by way of clarification?

Carol Johnson: No, just thanks. I have got some really useful comments. That has been incredibly helpful to me too, so thank you very much.

Lisa Strelein: We will finish up there, and thank Carol very much for coming all the way to talk to us today.