Reconciliation:
The Genesis of a New Social Representation

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In this paper we examine the various ways in which the recently introduced concept of 'reconciliation' into Australian public discourse was represented and constructed by political and community leaders during the 1997 Australian Reconciliation Convention. This Convention became an important site from which contested representations of reconciliation emerged and subsequently proliferated into the wider Australian polity. A discursive analysis of a subset of 12 speeches delivered at the Convention demonstrated that the concept of reconciliation was represented as a process moving towards peaceful co-existence of different cultural groups within Australian society. A common and pervasive metaphor that was used by speakers to anchor this process to the already familiar was that of a journey in which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people walked together. This journey of walking together was constructed explicitly as natural, necessary, moral, and based on common-sense. Furthermore, reconciliation was represented as an essential process in the development of a unified nation. Reconciliation was constructed as simultaneously a top-down process involving government and institutional policies and practices, and a bottom-up or 'grass-roots' process involving the wider Australian community. Both practical and symbolic actions were represented as necessary for reconciliation to become a reality, requiring both changes at a collective and political level, and changes at the individual psychological level. Our discussion focuses on how these representations of reconciliation and the public debates they have generated in the wider Australian community are inextricably related to struggles over competing versions of Australia's history and national identity.

Introduction

On May 28, 2000, in a symbolic gesture of support for reconciliation, over 200,000 people walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge (Steketee & Saunders, 2000, May 29). This paper examines the various ways in which the recently introduced concept of 'reconciliation' was represented and constructed by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders at a highly politicised and public forum in May 1997 – the Australian Reconciliation Convention. This forum became an important site from which contested representations of reconciliation emerged and subsequently proliferated into the wider Australian polity. Following from Serge Moscovici's (1984; 1988; 1998) theory of social representations, our broader aim is to map the trajectory of this new and unfamiliar concept that originated from the reified universe of formal political processes, to its eventual diffusion and popularisation into everyday talk and discourse in the consensual universe. The research reported in this paper presents an analysis of the representations and constructions of reconciliation that emerged at this highly significant and symbolic event: an event that can be viewed as a microcosm of the 'expert' and formal public talk on reconciliation that has pervaded Australian political discourse since this historic convention.

Australian Reconciliation

While relations between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or Indigenous Australian minorities, and the non-Indigenous majority have been a recurrent concern throughout Australia's colonial history, this relationship has assumed an extraordinarily salient position in Australian politics during the last decade, due to a number of highly controversial political issues. The 1992 Mabo land rights case and subsequent Native Title Act (1993) – that entitled Indigenous Australians, for the first time, to make traditional land claims under the law – became forerunners to an ensuing climate of heated political and public debate over the entitlements and rights of Indigenous peoples. The legal and political recognition of Native Title was a watershed in Australian political history as it officially dismantled the doctrine of 'terra nullius', which had held that the settlers of the First Fleet in 1788 arrived in an 'empty' land. This new legislation recognised for the first time that prior to European 'settlement', Australia had been inhabited and owned by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who had occupied the land for thousands of years. In 1996 the emergence of Pauline Hanson's extremist One Nation Party firmly placed 'racial' politics on centre stage, as did the newly elected Liberal Coalition Government of John Howard, whose social policies departed from those of the previous Keating Labor Government.

In 1991, the Federal parliament unanimously voted to found the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation whose major objective was described as: "increasing awareness in white Australians of Aboriginal people and their needs and hence bringing about attitudinal change in the majority population" (Bennett, 1999, p. 34). A major task of this Council was to define and explain core elements of reconciliation, and increase public support for the process. The introduction of the relatively unfamiliar and nebulous concept of 'reconciliation' into Australian public discourse resulted in widespread debate regarding the precise ways in which reconciliation is to be defined and implemented as social policy. In May 1997, the Council convened the Australian Reconciliation Convention to review the reconciliation process up to that time, and to set achievable goals for the future. One of the most important of these goals was the production of a Reconciliation Document in time for the Centenary of Federation in January 2001.

By the time of the Convention, relations between the Prime Minister and Indigenous leaders were especially strained as a result of the Wik debate. John Howard and his government had proposed a highly controversial '10-point plan' to amend the High Court's Wik judgement. The High Court ruled in 1996 that Native Title (or Indigenous ownership of land) could co-exist on pastoral leaseholds1. The Liberal Coalition Government claimed that this created considerable uncertainty for leaseholders and threatened the livelihood of Australia's 'farming' community. (see LeCouteur, Rapley & Augoustinos, 2001).

The Convention also coincided with the tabling in Federal Parliament of *The Report of the National Inquiry Into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families* by The Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC, 1997a). The Commission's report concluded that over the period 1910 to 1970 the forcible removal of Indigenous children had been a widespread and commonplace activity in Australia. It was estimated that between one-in-three and one-in-ten Indigenous children had been separated from their families and placed in institutions, missions, foster homes, and adoptive families. The targeting of part Aboriginal children for removal was a particular form of this practice that reflected the assimilation policies of successive governments. As many government and institutional documents have made clear, these policies were pursued with the view that in the long-term, Aboriginal people as a distinct 'racial' and 'cultural' group would (and should) eventually disappear (Manne, 1998).

The Commission concluded that the systematic separation of generations of Indigenous children (who came to be called the 'Stolen Generations') constituted "a gross violation of … human rights" and "an act of genocide contrary to the Convention of Genocide ratified by Australia in 1949" (HREOC, 1997b, p. 27). Among the many recommendations of the Commission was the statement that "everyone affected by forcible removals should be entitled to reparation [including] the children who were forcibly removed, their families, communities, children, and grandchildren" (HREOC, 1997b, p. 29). One of the specific recommendations for reparation was "That all Australian parliaments … negotiate with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commission a form of words for official apologies to Indigenous individuals, families and communities and extend those apologies with wide and culturally appropriate publicity" (p. 36).

This particular recommendation generated considerable debate and controversy, not only among members of the presiding conservative Coalition Government, but also among the wider Australian polity. Prime Minister Howard refused to offer a public apology to Indigenous people on behalf of 'the nation', arguing that 'present generations should not be held accountable for the practices of past generations'. An analysis of opinions among the wider Australian community revealed a multiplicity of views regarding the symbolic and moral functions associated with public apologies, and even as to the precise meaning of the words 'apology' and 'sorry' (see LeCouteur & Augoustinos, 2001). As shown by the analysis below, Howard's ongoing intransigence to publicly apologise to Indigenous people, over the governmental practice of the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families, conflicted significantly with the views of Indigenous leaders, who viewed such an apology as *essential* to the reconciliation process. Thus, both the formal and informal debates around the

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1 Pastoral leaseholds refer to expanses of Crown land (owned by the Government) that have been leased to pastoralists for a 99-year term specifically, but not exclusively, for the grazing of livestock. 'Pastoralists' are people who raise livestock. Governments introduced pastoral leases in the nineteenth century as a way of regulating the holdings and activities of squatters who had occupied and appropriated large expanses of Australia's so-called 'wastelands'. "They became seen as Australia's version of the frontiersmen" (Bachelard, 1997, p. 23), many of whom amassed enormous wealth and in time, exercised considerable political influence.

issue of a public apology to Indigenous people for past injustices exemplify the contestation of meaning that the notion of 'reconciliation' has evoked in Australian public life.

Social representations theory and research

Since Moscovici's (1961) seminal work on the diffusion and popularisation of psychoanalytic concepts throughout sections of French society, social representations research has continued to concern itself with the ways in which new scientific, political, and economic ideas, otherwise known as 'reified' knowledge, proliferates into everyday discourse and common-sense. The diffusion of 'expert knowledge' is occurring at an ever-increasing rate as the 'lay' population appropriates more and more of this knowledge into its everyday reasoning and sense-making. The research reported here is concerned with the possible *constitutive origin* of a new social representation. We hope to contribute to existing research on social representations by mapping the *specific trajectory* of the word 'reconciliation', to delineate how a community arrives at a socially shared and negotiated understanding of a relatively new concept. In doing so, we must return to the sphere in which the term was first used in Australia: the public sphere of reified knowledge, for it is from formal public talk that individual citizens derive meanings and understandings.

On the basis of Moscovici's two processes of familiarisation, anchoring and objectification, we anticipate that the introduction of the novel concept of reconciliation into everyday discourse will take place through its assimilation and accommodation to already familiar concepts that are socially shared and culturally available. Moreover, we anticipate that this new concept will come to be embodied by graphical and metaphorical images to render the concept more concrete and accessible. As abstract notions are anchored to concrete ideas and thus understood via analogy (Thomas, 1969), and objectified via mental imagery (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), metaphor is a key way in which social representations are created; it too links the unfamiliar to the familiar. We thus analyse the recurring use of metaphors, tropes and images that are deployed in formal talk in order to see how the Australian community was introduced and oriented to the relatively unfamiliar and vague concept of reconciliation.

Texts under analysis

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation convened the Australian Reconciliation Convention in May 1997 in Melbourne, Australia. Over 1,800 people participated in the Convention, including politicians, Indigenous leaders, members of the general Australian public, and international guests. Twelve speeches were selected for analysis: seven by Indigenous speakers and five by non-Indigenous speakers. Indigenous speakers included: the 1997 Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Patrick Dodson (who gave both the opening and closing addresses); Marcia Langton (Reconciliation Council member); Mandawuy Yunupingu (musical artist); Lois 'Lowitja' O'Donoghue (CBE AM); Noel Pearson (Cape York Land Council Chairman); and Tammy Williams (youth representative). The non-Indigenous speakers were: John Howard (Prime Minister); Kym Beazley (Leader of the Opposition); Cheryl Kernot (Australian Democrats Leader); Jeff Kennett (Victorian Premier); and David Matthews (youth representative). The 12 texts under analysis totalled approximately 17,000 words.

Discursive Methodology

The recent 'turn to language' (Parker, 1991) in psychology has generated increasing interest in the fine-grain analysis of formal institutional talk, as well as everyday informal talk, as a means by which to understand the interactive and negotiated practices that are associated with the construction of meaning in everyday life. A particular strength of the analysis of policy documents and formal public talk is that the problem of reactivity is minimised. While there has been considerable debate between discursive psychologists and social representations researchers regarding the epistemological adequacy of each other's theories and methods, there is increasing recognition that the principles of discursive psychology and social representations theory propound congruent approaches to social psychological study (Farr, 1993; Harré, 1998).

Our analysis began with simple readings of the transcripts of 12 selected speeches. While statements regarding the definition of reconciliation were initially identified, the entire body of discourse was analysed in detail using Potter and Wetherell's (1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) method of analysing discourse. The major 'interpretative repertoires', or "recurrently used systems of terms used for characterising and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 149), were identified, as were overarching frameworks, or 'macrostructures', which place the repertoires in a wider context (van Dijk, 1987). Particular attention was paid to the deployment of 'common-sense' as a rhetorical resource by the speakers, and also to recurrently used metaphors. Common-sense, as well as metaphorical constructions, have been conceptually linked to the genesis of social representations: Moscovici explicitly likens social representations to commonsense, saying that representations are "the equivalent, in our society, of the myths and belief systems in traditional societies; they might even be said to be the contemporary version of common sense" (Moscovici, 1981, p. 181).

Analysis

One of the central functions of political rhetoric is to present the speaker in a positive light, or to construct a credible identity. This purposeful construction of the self is an important feature of political discourse, but as it is not a theoretical focus of the present research, we will not be analysing this aspect of the talk in detail. It should nonetheless be remembered that the presentation of self is an important function of political rhetoric (Billig, 1996), and one that was attended to by all of the speakers being analysed here.

Reconciliation as a process

The most dominant and pervasive representation of reconciliation was that of a process: a process that was long, fragile, fraught with difficulties and differences of opinion, but, nevertheless, a process in which all Australians must engage to achieve peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and acceptance of cultural differences. The word 'co-existence' was commonly used to anchor the nebulous concept of reconciliation to what is already familiar. For example, Lowitja O'Donoghue argues that reconciliation "is about *coexistence*", and similarly, Senator Cheryl Kernot states that "Reconciliation is about *co-existence* and sharing; it's about dialogue and agreement on how to share". Patrick Dodson boldly claims that, "The nation faces a simple truth: if we cannot achieve *coexistence*, then we cannot achieve reconciliation". Likewise, Marcia Langton represents co-existence as a challenge when she rhetorically asks: "can we *coexist*, can we sustain the rule of law in Australia and its application to all regardless of creed, colour or race?"

A common metaphor that was mobilized to anchor and lend imagery to the process of reconciliation was that of a journey. 'Reconciliation as a journey' suggested that there were different routes and paths to reconciliation, all having obstacles and posing difficulties, but all leading to the same endpoint – cultural co-existence. One of the most recurrently used phrases to refer to this journey was 'walking together'. For example:

> Council Chairman Patrick Dodson: … we must *walk together*. I urge everyone to help us ensure that this convention will be a catalyst for advancing the process – for working out exactly how we can *walk together***.**

> Premier Jeff Kennett: … the vast majority of Australians are with you seeking reconciliation. The important things are, how do we achieve it, and whether we're prepared to achieve it *walking together* step by step.

Linked to this metaphor of a journey, several speakers referred to the process of reconciliation as being at the 'crossroads', requiring urgent attention and commitment from political leaders and the community at large. As can be seen from the examples below, deploying this clichéd metaphor suggests urgency, and invokes a simple mental image implying the importance of choosing and deciding to take the right path.

> David Mathews: It is clear that this convention takes place at a crucial time in our shared history; the reconciliation process is at the *crossroads*.

> Senator Cheryl Kernot: Make no mistake about it - our country is at the *crossroads*. Recent events have shown us how easy it is to derail the path of reconciliation with fear and racism

> Patrick Dodson: Reconciliation stands at a *crossroads* as the nation debates two extremely important issues: native title and the Stolen Generation.

Clearly, all speakers imply that there is a binary choice to be made: one that advances the goal of reconciliation, and one that obstructs or derails this important goal. Failure to make the 'right choice', or to take the 'right path', invokes the spectre of social conflict and disunity. Indigenous Council member Marcia Langton articulates very clearly this binary-choice metaphor, when she says that reconciliation

> presents us with *two inherent choices*. We have the choice of cooperating for the larger good through reconciliation, *or* we have the choice of continuing conflict, which undermines our national potentiality for well-being and success.

This form of either-or decision making imbues reconciliation with impressive urgency, and it relates directly to the use of the cliché "the crossroads", and thus metaphor of a journey.

All speeches contained intuitively appealing statements that either construct reconciliation as the moral or 'right' thing to do, construct Australians as people who will 'naturally' reconcile, or serve to make the specific construction of reconciliation being put forward seem obvious. While we expected common-sense notions that were shared within the Australian speech community to figure prominently in the texts we analysed, we were surprised to find that common-sense was at times called upon *explicitly* by speakers when constructing their versions of the reconciliation process:

> Jeff Kennett: Quite clearly, reconciliation should not be difficult. It should be based on *commonsense*, it should be based on good will and it should be based on the spirit of what is possible.

> Prime Minister John Howard: This is a process that draws on Australians from all walks of life and all kinds of backgrounds. What brings them together is a faith in the power of Australian values, the values of decency, tolerance, fairness and down-to-earth *common sense*.

Of particular interest is the way in which Howard portrays Australians as conducive to the reconciliation process, due to shared social values, one of which is "common sense." In this way, Howard is linking the nebulous notion of reconciliation to culturally familiar and shared representations of Australians as tolerant, fair and 'down-to-earth' people.

Of course, common-sense was also called upon in more implicit and subtle ways by the speakers. Indeed, the two macrostructures that we identify below, as structuring the talk around reconciliation, also portray reconciliation as a process that is natural, right, moral and sensible. Common-sense is thus a frequently mobilized rhetorical resource that features implicitly in many of the extracts we present below.

Macrostructures

We identified two distinct frameworks within which the speakers structured their talk on reconciliation. These may be labelled "semantic macrostructures" of talk, which are "properties of the global meaning of discourse" (van Dijk, 1987, p. 48). Van Dijk (1987) writes that these frameworks, or topics, serve to summarise and define the important 'lower-level' aspects of talk. The macrostructures recurrently used to construct reconciliation in the 12 speeches of interest are: constructing reconciliation as a practical and/or symbolic process, and representing reconciliation as a top-down and/or bottom up process.

The Practical and the Symbolic. Practicality is a re-occurring trope in all of the speeches, and is often associated with representing reconciliation as a top-down process. When describing reconciliation in practical terms, speakers focus on quantifiable changes, specific and achievable goals, and legal processes. Symbolism is also a pertinent feature of most speeches, and can be seen as both opposing and complementing practicality. When reconciliation is represented as involving spirituality and emotion, being ideational rather than material, and requiring psychological changes at the collective level of the nation, symbolism is being invoked. Nearly all the speakers discuss both the practical and the symbolic aspects to reconciliation, and negotiate their talk around these two themes.

The majority of the speakers (10) construct and represent reconciliation as both a practical and symbolic process: the two themes are inherently intertwined. For example, the issue of Indigenous land rights is represented as a practical matter, requiring legal resolution, but the recognition and acknowledgment of Indigenous people's spiritual and cultural connection to land is constructed as symbolic. Patrick Dodson acknowledges the ancestral spiritual links of the local Indigenous Kulin population, and asks for a minute of silence to remember the Stolen Generation. But he also deploys the notion of practicality when constructing reconciliation:

> … reconciliation has taken on a life of its own in communities, workplaces and institutions. … which demonstrates that reconciliation is becoming a people's movement. All this creates hope and optimism. But we must translate that into *practical* commitments by individuals and institutions.

Of significant importance is that practicality is advocated to the complete exclusion of symbolism by Prime Minister Howard. As the political leader of the nation, Howard strategically sought to define the parameters of a particular version of reconciliation, a version that was to become fiercely contested by Indigenous groups and his political opponents.

Reconciliation is constructed by Howard as an issue that should be dealt with in a practical, on-the-ground sense, and not one based on symbolic gestures.

> The reconciliation process must focus on the future in a positive and principled way. Specific strategies need to be devised, specific priorities need to be identified and specific *practical* programmes need to be agreed and implemented …

> Reconciliation will not work if it puts a higher value on *symbolic* gestures and overblown promises rather than *practical* needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in areas like health, housing, education and employment.

> It will not work if it is premised solely on a sense of national guilt and shame. Rather we should acknowledge past injustices and focus our energies on addressing the root causes of current and future disadvantage among our indigenous people.

Here Howard invokes several self-sufficient rhetorical arguments in succession; they are all premised on common-sense, and all require little elaboration or supportive argumentation. Specifically, Howard invokes the common-sense argument 'you have to be practical' emphasising the importance of being realistic (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). He accomplishes this by setting up a specific contrast between 'symbolic gestures' and 'practical needs'. This practical as opposed to symbolic approach to reconciliation is what clearly differentiates Howard's construction of reconciliation from that of Indigenous leaders who consistently represent a national apology as a symbolic *prerequisite* to reconciliation. Howard sets up these two constructions, the practical and the symbolic, as either/or contrasts in order to justify and legitimate his position on the issue of a national apology to the Stolen Generations.

Howard proceeds to further justify his construction of reconciliation as a practical rather than symbolic process when arguing that, reconciliation will not work if it based on a sense of national guilt and shame as opposed to redressing "current and future" Indigenous disadvantage. Implicit in this argument is that an apology to Indigenous peoples for past practices will necessarily invoke national guilt and shame. Note also the explicit contrast between the past and present/future that Howard sets up in this paragraph. Reconciliation will not work if it is based on the shame and guilt associated with past injustices; rather we should focus on the here and now and of course, the future. The overarching drive of Howard's address is always towards the present and the future rather than the past. Again this is implicitly linked to the common-sense argument that 'you cannot change the past' (Wetherell & Potter, 1992). As other work in the discursive tradition has demonstrated, metaphors around movement towards the future, around not becoming stuck in the past are frequently found in political rhetoric (Lyons, Stephens, Morgan, Praat, & Tuffin, 1996).

In contrast to Howard, whose speech is rhetorically framed around his refusal to offer a national apology to the Stolen Generations, all Indigenous speakers represent this as the *symbolic core* of reconciliation. O'Donoghue argues that a national apology for past injustices is an "essential starting point" for reconciliation:

> It is not just about overcoming disadvantage – though that is important. It is not just about saying "I'm sorry" or "we forgive". But those words are essential starting points -- without qualification.

Two of the non-Indigenous speakers also focus on this issue, one of whom is the Opposition Leader, Kym Beazley, who calls on the government to apologise to the Stolen Generation:

> If the first step to healing for indigenous Australians is for the Australian
> Parliament to propose and pass an expression of profound regret for the injustices
> and dehumanising treatment that have been a part of indigenous peoples' shared
> experience of European settlement, then let us so move.

History became a hotly contested site during the reconciliation debate, and as such, representations of reconciliation were inextricably linked to particular versions of Australia's history. Tammy Williams states that the starting point, the "most important step" towards reconciliation, is the symbolic and emotional acknowledgement by all Australians of the nation's "atrocious" history:

> Undoubtedly there are a number of steps to reconciliation, but especially our part
> of the most important step, I believe, is that all Australians must adequately
> address and acknowledge the atrocious events of our past. Only after this has been
> achieved can we all begin to live and focus upon our future.

Most speakers represented this acknowledgement of past injustices towards Australia's Indigenous people as a moral imperative on the part of all Australians. Common phrases such as 'facing the truth', 'coming to terms with the past', and 'dealing with the past honestly' were deployed recurrently by speakers, the majority of whom constructed this as a central and core requirement for reconciliation. Moreover, acknowledging the past was constructed as a difficult, emotional and affective process, one requiring 'compassion', 'honesty' and 'maturity':

> Patrick Dodson: The Stolen Generation report challenges this nation's capacity to
> *face the truth* of its past and deal with it in an open and compassionate way.

> Noel Pearson: The first issue is our need to *come to terms with our history*. And
> that is no untroubling business … the country [has] suffered from over 150 years
> of the Great Australian Silence about the true history of the frontier, and the place
> of Aboriginal people in Australian history.

> Senator Cheryl Kernot: Reconciliation is about owning and sharing our real
> history. It's about having the maturity to *deal with the past honestly*.

The concept of reconciliation was thus inextricably linked to Australia's history; more specifically to the history of injustice suffered by Indigenous people since European colonisation. The debates over reconciliation that ensued in the Australian wider polity became a hotly contested arena over competing and contrasting versions of the nation's history. This was no surprise given that the HREOC's report on the Stolen Generations was a scathing critique of the past policies of successive state and Federal governments in the removal of Indigenous children from their families. Indeed, the report described these practices as 'acts of genocide'. In his speech to the Convention, Prime Minister Howard stood alone in rejecting the findings of the report, refusing to accept its recommendation for a national apology to Indigenous people. Importantly, Howard justifies and legitimates this position by invoking a contrasting version of Australia's history that strongly contests the story of dispossession and genocide that is documented in the Stolen Generations Report:

> In facing the realities of the past, however, we must not join those who would
> portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of
> imperialism, exploitation and racism.

Such a portrayal is a gross distortion and deliberately neglects the overall story of great Australian achievement that there is in our history to be told, and such an approach will be repudiated by the overwhelming majority of Australians who are proud of what this country has achieved although inevitably acknowledging the blemishes in its past history.

In the extract above, Howard describes the story of Indigenous dispossession and oppression as a "gross distortion" of Australia's history. He deploys a series of extreme descriptive dimensions such as "*disgraceful* record", "*gross* distortion", "*deliberately* neglects", to represent this as an abnormal and extreme version of Australia's history. Howard uses these extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) to distance himself from this version of history and to set it up as an oppositional contrast to his own preferred version, "the overall story of great Australian achievement". Moreover, he argues that the former version of history is a historical narrative, that is not shared by the "overwhelming majority of Australians", signalling, that he, Howard, represents a majority view that by implication does not distort, neglect or misrepresent Australia's 'true' history (see Augoustinos, LeCouteur & Soyland, 2001). Thus what was at stake during the debates on reconciliation was the power to define particular versions of social reality: a nation's collective history, national identity and national moral standing. We will return to this important issue later.

Top-Down and Bottom-Up Processes. Another pervasive structure around which reconciliation was framed was the representation of reconciliation as a top-down and or bottom-up process. These representations were not mutually exclusive, internally homogeneous, or singularly deployed by the speakers: each one shifted between these two representations throughout their talk.

When reconciliation was represented as a top-down process, speakers depicted it in terms of law-making and governmental policy. This places responsibility on governments and institutional authorities, to actively legislate and implement policies to facilitate reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In contrast, the bottom-up account commonly represented reconciliation as a 'people's movement', placing responsibility on every individual Australian to bring about a communal psychological shift in attitudes, values and everyday practices. While the two frameworks are quite distinct, all of the speakers deploy both representations in their addresses. Indeed, the inter-relatedness of both approaches is acknowledged by Indigenous leader, Lowitja O'Donoghue:

The preparation of the new Strategic Plan of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation now becomes an important negotiating document. It will be given greater clarity by the discussions at this historic and timely convention. More than that, we have seen evidence that the people's movement has taken root and will send its own signal to our political leaders.

Likewise, Premier Kennett and Tammy Williams respectively argue that reconciliation:

… can only be achieved if in fact the parliamentary and the legal processes establish the framework in which people of goodwill are prepared to actually achieve outcomes that suit all Australians not only this year – but for the long term.

… is a people's movement in which every member plays a vital role. Reconciliation will only work if each and every one of us, from the political to the grass roots level, works towards and focuses upon our vision for a united Australia.

Thus top-down (political and legal processes) and bottom-up ("people of goodwill", "people's movement", "grass roots") approaches are both invoked in representations of reconciliation.

Prime Minister Howard's emphasis on practical reconciliation is strongly linked with a top-down approach to reconciliation, centering on government policy and funding increases to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage:

> First, we need a renewed national focus on the true causes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. For my Government, this is the cornerstone of the reconciliation process. It is why we have given such priority to programmes that directly target indigenous disadvantage in health, housing, education and employment … In overall terms we are committed to spend over $428 million more on indigenous specific programs in our first four years than was spent during the previous four years.

Here Howard presents Indigenous disadvantage as *the* problem that needs to be overcome in order to reconcile. By constructing reconciliation as an issue of funding, and by citing 'quasi-objective figures' such as "$428 million" (van Dijk, 1993) to address Indigenous disadvantage, Howard is able to present his government as making practical and material progress towards reconciliation. However, Howard also emphasizes the responsibility of individual Australians to commit psychologically to the reconciliation process by saying that "True reconciliation must come from the hearts and minds of the Australian people".

> Governments and leaders alone cannot make reconciliation happen simply through legislation, decrees, declarations or rhetoric. True reconciliation must come from the hearts and minds of the Australian people, in the respect they have for differences, in the attitudes they encourage in their children, and in their recognition of the common destiny we share together as Australians.

Despite this reference to the importance of the Australian people's commitment to the reconciliation process, as Luke's (1997) cogently argues, Howard largely constructs reconciliation as a top-down governmental process in which he, Howard, and his government are presented as 'heroic agents'. The entire narrative structure of his speech positions the Government as the primary active agents of the reconciliation process: they will commit to a practical program of specific government initiatives and policies; they will commit increased government funds and resources for indigenous education, housing, and health. In this version of reconciliation, reconciliation is to be enacted and driven by government and government alone. There are very few places in the speech where indigenous people are represented as active agents or historical actors in this process. As Luke (1997, p. 364) puts it: Howard "introduces indigenous peoples as the grammatical object of 'disadvantage' and of 'commitment' [by government], but not as active agents with any capacities for economic development, social formation, political action or self-determination". Indigenous people are primarily 'objects of power' - passive recipients of government policies and practical programs. Likewise, little active agency is ascribed to the non-indigenous majority in the reconciliation process, other than to acknowledge past injustices and to commit psychologically and attitudinally to Howard's program of practical reconciliation.

Significantly, all Indigenous speakers argued that the political resolution of Native Title was an essential ingredient to the reconciliation process, and that the Government's 10-point Wik legislation to extinguish native title on pastoral lands was a significant impediment to this process. Patrick Dodson makes this clear in his opening address:

> The ten-point plan in response to Wik is not acceptable. Why not? Because, taken as a whole, it does not treat coexistence fairly. It takes away the rights of Indigenous people which were recognized in the common law of Australia by the highest court in the land.

Similarly, Mandawuy Yunupingu describes Indigenous land entitlements as a key issue of reconciliation, and the Government's 10-point plan as "yet another example of the erosion of our basic rights". Lowitja O'Donoghue states categorically that the plan "TAKES AWAY our rights as indigenous people" (original emphasis), and Noel Pearson describes land rights as a "fundamental" issue to be settled "in order to achieve reconciliation". These criticisms of the Government's approach to Indigenous entitlement to land necessarily focused on political and legal (institutional) processes emanating from above that are central and fundamental to reconciliation. At the same time, however, all Indigenous speakers made reference to the 200 years of struggle around which Indigenous people collectively mobilized to bring about change in their political, economic and social conditions. In this way reconciliation was constructed as part of a long and proud tradition in the fight for justice and equality, brought about by the collective action of Aboriginal people. Pearson and O'Donoghue respectively refer to this struggle, in the extracts below.

> Over 30 years it took for that struggle to produce the modest but fundamental achievement of 1967 which saw the Indigenous people of this country for the first time become citizens of the Australian nation. Thirty years of incremental millimetre by millimetre struggle … But we have made a great deal of progress, and that progress started to steamroll after 1967 … And of course the subsequent struggles at Wave Hill, the Tent Embassy, Noonkanbah, the 1982 Commonwealth Games, and of course the struggle by Eddie Mabo, gathered pace.

> More than half a century ago, people such as Jack Patten, Jack Ferguson and William Cooper asked for a 'new deal for Aborigines', for 'justice, decency and fair play'.

These references to the history of collective action on the part of Indigenous people for justice and equality invoke metaphors of struggle, battle and conflict. Reconciliation is represented as part of an ongoing historical process, one that is slow, incremental and hard fought. As such, reconciliation was recurrently described as requiring, "courage", "strength", "moral fibre", and "commitment", not only on the part of Indigenous Australians in maintaining the continuity of this process, but also non-Indigenous Australians, in coming to terms with the injustices of the past. As with the use of common-sense and the journey metaphor, comparing reconciliation to a battle serves to link the unfamiliar notion of reconciliation to that which is familiar. Again, we see here how reconciliation was represented as a process imbued with affect and emotion, linking it once more to symbolic acts.

National Unity and Togetherness Repertoire

Discourses of national unity and 'togetherness' have been identified as common and pervasive repertoires in everyday talk and political rhetoric on 'race' related matters (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Rapley, 1999; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Such repertoires were commonly mobilised in representations of reconciliation by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous speakers. Speakers argued that in order to achieve reconciliation, Australians, whatever their backgrounds, must 'work together' towards peaceful 'co-existence' and mutual acceptance.

> Lowitja O'Donoghue: … it is for all of us to continue to *work together* to make this a nation which can proudly proclaim it has achieved a new maturity in its nationhood.

> David Matthews: We will all need strength, courage and foresight if we are to *work together* and achieve our vision for the future.

In the extract below, Howard emphasises the necessity for all Australians, regardless of their backgrounds, to identify collectively at the superordinate category of 'the nation'. Moreover, Howard represents national unity as concomitant with Australia's national interests.

> All Australians, irrespective of their background or colour or belief or religion, share a common destiny. We all have rights and obligations as Australians. What inspires the process of national reconciliation … is the conviction that we can, and must, develop our future together as Australians with mutual respect for, and appreciation of our differences and with a unifying commitment to promoting Australia's national interests.

In contrast to Howard's non-problematic representation of the Australian people as sharing a common destiny and identity, Indigenous speakers pointed to the inherent ambivalence that an 'Australian' collective identity holds for Aboriginal people. The recognition and acceptance of cultural diversity was invoked by Indigenous speakers in ways that challenged and constrained the excesses of a banal nationalism (Billig, 1997), that homogenised national identity. As Pearson makes clear, Indigenous rights to self-determination have always posed problems for majority group members who have viewed such rights as threatening national unity.

> Like many indigenous people in this country, I am equivocal about my Australian citizenship … It is going to be up to white and black Australians to sit down and negotiate the meaning of indigenous self determination in this country. And this will raise troubling questions for white Australians and politicians who raise the question: is not indigenous self determination inconsistent with the concept of a one united Commonwealth of Australia? … Whether self determination is inconsistent with the concept and aspiration of national unity is a real hot button issue.

O'Donoghue reminds the audience that the issue of citizenship for Indigenous people has yet to be resolved:

> Citizenship has been the centre of our aspirations in determining our relationship with the wider Australian community … It was not until 1967 that the constitutional referendum enabled us to be counted as citizens … Thirty years on, the nation is still attempting to resolve that citizenship.

Importantly, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous speakers represented reconciliation as a necessary milestone in Australia's identity as a nation. Indeed, the Convention was sub-titled 'Renewal of the Nation'. As can be seen from the extracts below, 'nationhood' and 'national identity' were recurring themes throughout most of the speeches.

> Lowitja O'Donoghue: Reconciliation is about the moral fibre of the nation, where we stand in the international community, how we go forward into the next century, how we write our history together.

Opposition Leader Kym Beazley: The Council brings together indigenous Australians with members of the wider community and draws from across the political spectrum. Their work is at the heart of a process essential to this nation's capacity to face the next century united, peaceful and justly proud.

General Discussion

This paper has examined a subset of speeches delivered during the 1997 Australian Reconciliation Convention, focusing on how political and community leaders represented the largely unfamiliar term 'reconciliation' to the larger Australian public. More specifically, we sought to analyse how the concept of reconciliation was anchored to already familiar cultural concepts and knowledge shared within the Australian speech community. Given the Convention's historic and symbolic status at a time of increasing racial tension, and the enormous media and public attention it received, we have treated this Convention as a significant site for the potential genesis of a social representation of reconciliation.

Our analysis demonstrates that the concept of reconciliation was primarily represented by the majority of speakers as a process moving towards a respectful and peaceful co-existence of different cultural groups within Australian society. Implicit in these constructions was that Australia, despite its projection as a harmonious 'multicultural' society, had yet to achieve such a status in its relations with its Indigenous peoples. A common and pervasive metaphor that was used by speakers to anchor this process to the already familiar was that of a journey in which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people walked together. We also demonstrated how this journey of walking together was constructed explicitly as natural, necessary, moral, and based on common-sense. This representation constructs reconciliation as a process of the utmost importance to Australia as a unified nation. It is simultaneously a top-down process involving government and institutional policies and practices, and a bottom-up or 'grass-roots' process involving the wider Australian community. Both practical and symbolic actions were represented as necessary for reconciliation to become a reality, requiring both changes at a collective and political level, and changes at the individual psychological level.

While the above features were commonly shared elements in the representations and constructions of reconciliation articulated by all speakers, it is important to emphasise that there were also important and crucial differences in the representations of reconciliation that emerged from the Convention. These differences are best exemplified by the Prime Minister's speech which sought to represent and construct a version of reconciliation that was ideologically opposed to that of Indigenous leaders. Whereas the Prime Minister steadfastly refused to make a national apology to Aboriginal people for the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families and communities, all Indigenous speakers represented such an apology as the central and *necessary* prerequisite to reconciliation. Indeed, the Indigenous speakers were quite explicit that in the absence of such an apology for historical injustices, reconciliation could not be achieved. Among other arguments (see above), the Prime Minister has consistently justified his position by claiming that his view reflects the view of the majority of Australians (Shanahan, 2000, June 7). Likewise, Indigenous speakers represented the political resolution of Indigenous entitlement to land (Native Title), as crucial and central to the reconciliation process, criticizing the Government's attempts to limit and constrain these rights.

Our analysis also demonstrates that what was at stake during the debates on reconciliation was the power to define particular versions of a nation's history and national identity. Despite Howard's rejection of 'symbolic' constructions of reconciliation, his speech can be seen as

representing a *symbolic struggle* to depict Australia's history as an heroic achievement over hardship and adversity that is to be celebrated in the present, rather than a tragedy of invasion, dispossession, and genocide of Indigenous communities. As Billig (1997) argues, any nation's history involves a complex dialectic of collective remembering and forgetting; a dialectic between the competing tales and narratives that flag nationhood and the brutality and violence upon which nations are built. The various speeches we analysed shifted between these competing tales and narratives, on the one hand presenting Australia as an optimistic and unified nation, sharing common values and goals, and on the other, a nation divided by the racist practices of the past and present. The debates over reconciliation then, and the various representations it generated, have come to represent and embody contested versions of Australia's history and national identity. Previous research has demonstrated that for many white majority group members the historical narrative of Australia's colonial past is primarily a heroic tale of discovery, white settlement, progress and civilisation (Augoustinos, 2001; Augoustinos et al., 1999). Within this grand narrative, Indigenous Australians, like most Indigenous peoples around the world, are marginalized, relegated to the status of 'Other'; their stories either unheard, or dismissed as irrelevant musings on the past, that they would do well to forget.

Indeed, among the enormous number of people who participated in the Reconciliation Day marches across Australia, there existed contradictory and conflicting opinions regarding a national apology for the Stolen Generations. Many of those who 'walked together' in a symbolic act of reconciliation, did not believe that a national and public apology was warranted for historical injustices against Aboriginal people (Shanahan, 2000, June 7). Common rhetorical arguments that were mobilized to justify and rationalise these seemingly contradictory positions were that, 'such things happened in the past, we need to put the past behind us and move on to a more positive and constructive future', 'present generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of past generations', and 'we should not apply the morals and standards of today to judge past attitudes and practices' (see LeCouteur & Augoustinos, 2001).

Of course, the present study is restricted to the discursive analysis of formal public talk on reconciliation and says very little as to how these public representations were 'taken up' and instantiated in everyday talk and communication by the wider Australian community. To fully realize Moscovici's vision of studying 'social representations in the making' we are presently engaged in following through our initial analysis with a larger study analyzing talk and text on representations of reconciliation in everyday conversation and argument. Philogene (1994) writes that it is by means of everyday communication that a representation is "fused with reality", or naturalised. What we can conclude, thus far, is that the metaphor of 'walking together' that was so central in the representations of reconciliation contained in the speeches we analysed, came to be *symbolically realized* by the thousands of people across Australia who participated in the Reconciliation Day marches. While these were the largest demonstrations that Australia had seen since the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in the 1960s, it is clear that this symbolic show of support for the process of reconciliation is not necessarily matched by public support for the symbolic (national apology for the Stolen Generations), political (Native Title), and material gains that are being fought for by Indigenous people. As the work on 'race' discourse has demonstrated, the non-Indigenous majority in Australia, and similar dominant majorities in other western nations, articulate ambivalent and contradictory views that are put together in flexible ways to justify and legitimate existing social inequalities that favour their own dominant position (Augoustinos et

al., 1999; Blommaert & Verschureren, 1998; Nairn & McCreanor, 1991; van Dijk, 1991; 1993; Wetherell & Potter, 1992).

Similarly, the notion of co-existence – so central to representations of reconciliation in our analysis – is also a contested site for conflicting and shifting meanings. While cultural co-existence as a political and social ideal is easily embraced as a desirable, common-sensical and widely shared goal, the precise ways in which co-existence is to be realised in social policy and practice has been an ideological battleground throughout Australia's colonial history. We noted above how Indigenous leaders viewed Indigenous citizenship and self-determination as central requirements for cultural co-existence. In contrast, discursive studies have clearly demonstrated how majority group members primarily construct notions of co-existence as requiring minority group members to subvert their distinct cultural and social identities for the greater good of national unity. Adopting a superordinate collective identity at the level of the nation is represented as a moral imperative, whereas cultural and social distinctiveness is seen to threaten and fragment a collective national identity (Augoustinos et al., 1999; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). The Indigenous leader Noel Pearson speaks of this dilemma in his speech, noting the ideological tensions that Indigenous self-determination evokes for many non-Indigenous Australians. Such ideological tensions and contradictions also characterize the debates and discourses around multiculturalism, ethnic diversity and 'tolerance' in most western nations (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Hage, 1998).

As we have tried to demonstrate in our analysis, the notion of reconciliation is inextricably linked to issues of identity, nationhood, and history, all of which are sites of struggle between different social groups in Australia to construct particular versions of reality. Given the polemical nature of these representations (Moscovici, 1988; Vala, Garcia-Marques, Gouveia-Pereira & Lopes, 1998), we conclude that at this point in Australia's history, there is no cohesive and consensual representation of reconciliation that is hegemonic within the Australian community. Rather, there are a number of conflicting and contradictory representations that compete with each other for ascendancy and dominance. This is likely to remain the case, at least until a future Federal government demonstrates a willingness to accommodate the symbolic, political and material aspirations of Indigenous people. While Prime Minister Howard ultimately rejected the Document of Reconciliation prepared by the Reconciliation Council that was presented at Corroboree 2000, the success of the reconciliation walk the following day, and the increasing willingness of nation-states around the world to apologise for historical injustices suggest that such issues are becoming central to a 'new international morality' framed by the identity politics of marginalized and oppressed groups (Barkan, 2000).

While there is no consensual social representation of reconciliation at this time in Australia, we suggest that the concept of reconciliation is a 'representation-in-the-making'. With time, and increasing public involvement and debate, the meaning of reconciliation is likely to become more centralised and consensualised, solidifying its status as a social representation. The direction this more concrete representation takes will be one of the most important outcomes in Australia's development. It will prescribe not only what government action is taken regarding Indigenous Australians, but will also have the power to influence every Australian's view of their nationhood, history, and identity. It is this view, that of the everyday Australian, that we are currently examining, in the hope of fully mapping the trajectory of shared knowledge and imaginings of 'reconciliation'.

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