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Whitefella Jump Up: Reconciliation is not enough

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Author

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Stephen Corry: Thank you. I have been asked to chair this evening and to introduce the speaker. Well the speaker needs no introduction; you all know who Germaine Greer is. There can be few people with as much international recognition indeed for her ideas, and that makes, I think, both the book and this evening extremely important.

Now I need to stress right at the beginning that I have never even been to Australia. My work over the last 32 years has been to try and establish how current atrocities against tribal peoples might be best prevented, and then to try and prevent them.

And my own personal experience of this has been mainly with peoples who have had relatively little contact with outsiders, mainly in western South America in Amazonia but also in coastal western South America and more latterly in the Kalahari and Southern Africa.

And just before I ask Germaine to speak to us, I pulled out a few of the things in the book, which struck with me as very deep echoes, having never been in Australia, echoes from these other places where I have been, and where I have seen incoming colonial peoples, even today, trying to dispossess the original peoples who were there and who are there, and they are powerful echoes.

Now I'd just like to pull out three of them really from the book.

One is that something really terrible has happened, and indeed is happening, and I think it's very important that people realise that. Anybody who doesn't, I know plenty of people who don't, know what's going on really is terrible and should be looked at seriously and thought about properly.

The second is the attitude of the colonists, and Germaine in the book refers to several things which I recognise very well, the idea that hunter-gatherers don't work, and so don't own the land, that you find everywhere with our hunter-gatherers today. As Germaine puts it so well, the wringing of hands over the chucking away of nice clothes, decent dresses and pinafores, and that again, I think there is a

message, a very important message for development thinking today.

You know, there are all kinds of things being built all over the world, and once the developer worker leaves, they very quickly fall into disuse are chucked away, all these nice clothes and nice pinafores, and why is that.

The idea that these peoples are childish, spontaneous and irrational, that is also very common currency everywhere where there are tribal peoples. Exactly the same ideas come up, they're childish. In Spanish speaking South America there is a word (('irationalas'?)), irrationals, which is used actually to refer to the Indians.

But thirdly, the powerful echo that I pulled out of the book was the adaptability of indigenous society, that they are actually natural survivors, that they have no sense whatsoever of any inferiority to the incoming colonists.

So I welcome the book a great deal, and I think there are few thinkers of international stature and recognition which have actually looked at this question. That indeed is perhaps surprising. Actually, I say few, I can't think of any over the last 30 or 40 years.

In the States Noam Chomsky looked at the treatment of Indians in various US satellite countries, Paraguay in the 70's, Guatemala in the 80's and so on, but he was looking principally from the point of view of US foreign policy, and how that impinged on what was going on there.

So I think it is really high time that we had an iconoclast to open the door to a discussion, a discussion, which perhaps should have started 100 years ago, perhaps 200 years ago, and it is high time that it starts today. So I would like to ask Germaine to jump up and give us her lecture.

Germaine Greer: Thank you Stephen, thank you very much. Like most writers I'm only really half aware of what I do when I do it.

I sometimes liken writing to excretion. There comes a moment when you have to unload it, and you're not quite sure what it is, and so I have done the best I can without pretending to knowledge that I don't have.

But what I hope I've done is set going this small idea, which may grow into a big idea. It will only grow into a big idea if lots of people take it up and become excited by it, and develop it. I don't own this idea, I don't lay claim to this idea at all. I'm not sure that I understand the idea terribly well myself. I want other people to explain the idea to me, people who understand better than I do.

Now when Peter Craven approached me in the beginning and asked me if I'd like to write a quarterly essay, I suggested that I write an essay on the subject of Aboriginality. Now I should explain to you, the quarter essay series is a polemic series that has, in the past, made a number of landmark contributions to what is called sometimes, the debate, about Aboriginal rights in Australia. In fact there is no debate. The debate was stifled in 1991 by a sort of ((butlerisk?)) muffler of bullshit, so that instead of having an argument about how we could proceed into a 21st century with some honour, we were saddled with the idea of reconciliation.

Now what really happened, when I said 'Aboriginality', is that the editor told me it was too long for the cover, that the cover had a certain type of graphical necessity, and we couldn't have a single word as long as 'Aboriginality', and he also said it sounded very academic, which was a bit of a surprise to me. So I cudgelled my brains and I came up eventually with '*Whitefella Jump Up*'. Now '*Whitefella Jump Up*' is the language we used to call pigeon, we now call Kriol, spelt with a 'K', this is to distinguish it from Creole, which is language based in French, because Kriol is considered to be based in English, but it seems to me all a bit of a carry-on.

One of the things that goes on in the modern world, as I'm sure you are aware, is we just reclassify things all the time. We change the ((limencature?)) so we can ditch the foregoing argument and start again, as if we were inventing the wheel.

So there I was trying to look for a way of saying to white Australians, that there is no way forward for us unless we jump up. Now a 'jump up' in cattle country means where you're droving cattle, they come to a bank and the cattle want to run along the bank, but you have to cut them off with the horses and make them jump up onto the bank, which they don't want to do, its hard work, and you make them. And from my point of view, I wanted Whitefellas in Australia to arrive at a higher level of consciousness, stop, look, listen, have a look at what you're doing. Instead of telling everybody what's right, have a look and see, it maybe what you've been doing is not extremely wrong, just stop.

One of the other ways I have of putting it is to say, 'sit on the ground', and this I take from Cathy Freeman, who at the end of her championship race, medal winning race in the Olympics in Sydney, said in a very distressed way, "I just need to sit on the ground". She had been being fashioned and marketed and bullied by the Australian media and by the sports establishment, and in that moment where she had won a great race for the Whitefellas, in her white suit with her black face, she needed to sit on the ground.

Now the other meaning is, the meaning that comes from the attempt by Aboriginal people to explain their behaviour with white folks when they first arrived in the country, and one of the ways they explained it was by saying, "You, my brother, jumped up. You are my brother who died unsaid, who is now reborn". Now the Whitefellas were so naïve that they supposed the Blackfellas meant that literally, and in any case they availed themselves of that relationship. "I'm your brother, okay fine bro lets go", except that of course, when they were finished using the brother, they dumped him and left him where they found him.

But it meant that he was resurrected, and this also is an idea of mine that the white settlers, God knows, that white settlers in my country had suffered terribly. They have suffered anguish, defeat and despair, which has been dressed up by marketing as a triumphal story. The settling of Australia is

not a triumphal story. If you spent as much time as I have wondering around the back blocks, you would have seen more abandoned homesteads, more rotting fences, more abandoned townships, more decaying churches even than you will see thriving townships.

We have no rural society in Australia. The fringes that we have left are under extreme pressure. I'm not speaking, of course, of the ((squatoocracy?)), but that's a separate question that we could deal with later maybe.

So what is my essay about? Well you see it's not a plea on behalf of Aborigines, it is not me telling you how much Aboriginal people suffer. One reason why I don't tell you that is I've spent too much time with Aboriginal people, and one of the marks of Aboriginal society is reticence, extreme reticence. The Aboriginal response to all kinds of pressure is withdrawal, is avoiding confrontation.

I am not about to parade in front of you the evidence of the die-back that is afflicting Aboriginal societies, I'm not going to talk about drug abuse, about alcohol, about glue sniffing, about violence, about suicide, I'm going to hope that you can keep these facts in the back of your mind.

But I'm not doing this, I didn't write my essay because I was shouldering the white woman's burden. I am not taking gruel and beef broth to the poor. I am concerned for my own mob. Aboriginal people will tell you, I can only speak for my mob; I can't speak for the other mobs.

It's interesting that the Aboriginal word for a group of people is used for a group of cattle. It's actually taken from the pastoral industry. I'm speaking for my mob; I'm speaking for Australian white people, for European descendants in Australia, because I think they're in trouble. I think that they are living in a state of denial, I think that they are eaten by a guilt that they are frantic to avoid, and they will go almost to any lengths to say, "But surely we've done the right thing, surely everything's okay. Look these Aborigines sit around, they take our money, they get huge amounts of money paid to them" da de da de da, you will see all of this, and you will hear it

on... you'll read it in tabloid newspapers; you will hear it on certain kinds of radio stations.

I am concerned for my own people because I think they have lost their way. Now that doesn't mean that I'm going to condemn my ancestors in Australia. I'm not going to tell you how viciously and badly they behaved. They certainly did behave viciously and badly, but I want you to understand something else.

Whether they were convict or free makes not a lot of difference. Either they were transhipped to Australia as convicts, or they came as, so called, free settlers who had run out of choices. Whether they were fleeing the Irish famine, whether they were dispossessed crofters from Scotland, whether they were my ancestors from the ((Tachino?)) who were dispossessed by the Austrians closing the border, so that my ancestors who swept chimneys in ((Alombodi ?)) for a thousand years, could not longer sweep their chimneys and then their rich relatives bought them out and sent them to Australia to make money in the gold rushes, which of course they didn't.

You want to see who makes money in a gold rush, go to St James' square, go and see Rio Tinto, they'll tell you who makes money in a gold rush, and how you do it. You don't do it by digging a hole in the ground.

I don't feel so much anger against my own white ancestors in Australia as I do tremendous pity. Everywhere I go in Australia, I see land that was cleared at a human cost that you can hardly imagine. Men and women who struggled against the most incredible odds, who chopped down vast numbers of trees with nothing but an axe, who then had to split them to make their split rail fencing, who cleared and cleared and cleared, who built themselves split log housing where the women went quietly mad and the men went broke. It's a miserable tale and everywhere you go in Australia you see the same thing. You see misdirected struggle and defeat.

Now Australians don't like to hear that because they believe that theirs is the lucky country. They are winners; you know it was a

success story, the settlement of Australia. It was anything but, and only by wilfully blinding themselves to what is going on in their country, can Australians go on pretending that this is a success story.

I don't condemn my ancestors who displaced Aboriginal people, I don't even condemn the white men who used black women, although I find it difficult to understand how, when the black women bore their children, they let them grow up in the native compound; they let them suffer the diseases and the poverty of the native compound. They ignored them. Some of them even boasted that they were breeding their own workforce.

That is amazing to me, and of course as you know, it was followed by a strange institutional attempt to sort it out by grabbing the 'half-cast' children and putting them in state institutions and bringing them up as white.

In order to understand the stolen generation, you have to understand first the crime against the people that meant that so many of the inhabitants of the native encampments were actually half-cast or indeed quarter-cast. You're not supposed to use those words anymore, and it's very hard to talk in this way now in Australia, and that is partly because of Aboriginal reticence. Aboriginal people will not discuss with you the role played by white men in their communities.

Even in a case like the case of Lang Hancock, you may recall, is the man who flew over the iron range, the ((Hamersley?)) Range and realised it was made of pure iron ore. He then staked out a claim to the whole area and became a multi millionaire.

His legitimate white offspring are now quarrelling over one penny per ton levied on every single ton of iron ore that is being removed from the Pilbara. But anyone will tell you, you go to the Aborigine encampments around about ((Ritanoom?)) in the Pilbara, that Lang Hancock had other children. He had Aboriginal children, and they're entitled, in my view anyway, morally to some of that immense wealth, but the Aboriginal people will not claim it. They will not shame themselves by claiming

that money from Lang Hancock's descendants. It's a very funny case now because it involves his wife whom he married in the last years of his life, and it's the famous quarrel between Rose Hancock, the wife, and the daughter of the second wife. Rose is the third wife.

And so it goes on this mad sort of dynasty tale, the fight between the heirs, but the heirs who make no sound, who do not raise their hands are the genuine owners of the land that was exploited by the descendants of Lang Hancock.

And I can tell you that they have drilled every square mile of the ((Hamersley?)) Range has been sampled for future exploitation. There is no limit to the gutting of Australia by the Europeans and their descendants. They see no reason for stopping what they do. Even the collapse of the market is not enough to stop what they do.

Even so, I'm not going to condemn them. I may deplore them, but I don't condemn them. I'm not here to apportion blame; I'm actually looking for a way forward.

I don't wish either, to offer you an argument for keeping Aboriginal people on their traditional lands as if they were animals in zoos. I don't think the zoo approach is appropriate. It has proved very difficult for Aboriginal people to live on their ancestral lands, when they have been cut off from the whole international commerce of the hunter-gatherer peoples across the continent of Australia. Besides, my Aboriginal brothers and sisters deserve entry to the 2001st century or whatever it is, yes, 2001st century, why should they be immured in a fake Palaeolithic past.

It's impossible, it cannot happen; they have no desire to be there. Even though they have a right to their traditional lands, their ancestral lands, they are now being given the right, accorded the right on condition that they are imprisoned within those lands. This is like somebody saying to you, "Yes you own that house and you may never leave it". This is craziness, and yet it masquerades as justice.

I'm not going to argue for separation for autonomous Aboriginal homelands, there are some who would. Noel Pearson refers to a concept of Aboriginal sovereignty, and one of my ambitions is to talk to him about this one day, because as far as I'm concerned, the notion of Aboriginal sovereignty only makes sense if it's understood to be sovereignty over the whole of Australia, and this is what my argument is.

I know its radical, I know its simple, its probably even simple minded, but I also think it's irresistible. The other odd thing is, I think it's doable. Why? Because Aborigines will let us do it, and that is more than we could ever have expected.

I'm not going to argue for apatite. You may think apatite is to do with abusing native people; in fact it's to do with the idea of separate equal, that's what it means in Dutch, apatite. I'm not going to argue for self determination, it is ironic isn't it that when we make self determination impossible, we then extend it as a privilege. It can't be done.

You cannot determine your own existence when in fact every single parameter of that existence has been irrevocably altered. I am also not going to argue for reconciliation. Some of you may have noticed that there was a brief flurry of interest in Australia, it's rare in the English press, but it did happen, it was kind of a second or two of passing interest where they announced that reconciliation had run out of steam that Australians didn't know anymore what reconciliation meant. I would say to you that reconciliation was never meant to mean anything. That reconciliation was a way of not having to do anything.

If you look at the reconciliation website on your computer, you will see it touchingly arrayed in red and yellow ochre, appalling artwork, which is a disgrace to the Aborigines whom it rips off, and it says things like, "Together we are doing it". What is it we're doing? Writing villainess pros is one of the things we're doing.

Now this is their mission statement, this is worthy of Butler, I'll tell you, this is a smoke screen of words, it can mean nothing.

"Reconciliation", it says, "among Indigenous" capital 'I', "and non-Indigenous Australians", I'm a non-indigenous Australian, even though I'm fourth generation Australian, indigenous means born in the place, never mind. Indigenous, an abstract group of people, who the hell are they talking about.

400,000 Australians now claim Aboriginal descent. Is that who they're talking about? Because most of those people live lives just like mine, mine in Australia anyway, suburban lives in Australia, 400,000 people. "Reconciliation among..." notice 'among', Jesus Christ, you wonder where their brains are, well I know where their brains are but I'm not supposed to say. "...among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is about...", we thought you were going to tell us what it was, but its not that, its 'about' that, "finding new and better ways of tackling problems", I should be grateful they didn't say 'issues'. I mean I am grateful they didn't say 'issues'. "...of tackling problems and of connecting with one another." Now say it to yourself a few times. Its not going to get you anywhere is it.

Reconciliation involves justice, well good, that's good, recognition and healing. Its just like the Butler Report, you sit around looking for the words that won't actually commit you to anything. No one's going to object to justice or recognition, hey. And healing, do you feel better now? Its about helping Australians move forward with a better understanding of the past, now I've just been trounced up and down hard talk, because I was accused of taking Australians back to the past, but in fact Australians don't understand their past.

Adam Goodes, you know, the man who won the Brownlow Medal last year, Australian rules footballer, Aboriginal man, had no idea about the story of his family. Why? Because when he asked his mother, she did the Aboriginal thing, she avoided the question. She found it too painful to talk about it, but not just too painful, too confrontational. She chose not to tell him her story. My father chose not to tell me his story either. Aboriginality is catching. She wouldn't

tell him her story. He went to university and did a course of Aboriginal studies and came back full of anger, because he understood how his family had suffered. And it was precisely that anger that his mother didn't want him to feel. We need this better understanding of our past.

My past, my poor bloody ancestors, for whom my heart breaks, I won't tell you the whole story about them, it is too harrowing to tell, but I certainly would not burden people with it who weren't interested, and I wouldn't... one of the things that happened in my life is that my father protected me from the miserable story of where he came from. He wanted me to grow up thinking I didn't need to feel inferior to anybody. He wanted me to grow up thinking I never needed to tell a lie. So he hid the truth from me, and he bore that spiritual weight all his life, and at first when I found out I hated him for it, and now I know better, now I thank him for it.

But Adam Goodes did that thing. He went and found out about the history of his people and he was so full of rage that he actually told the public who'd given him the Brownlow Medal, what he really thought about his own situation. He had to re-conquer his Aboriginality, and this is my argument you see, it's not a matter of race, it's a matter of culture, it's a matter of understanding, it's a matter of positioning yourself in the universe.

I won't bore you any further with this nonsense from the Reconciliation website; you can look at it for yourself. But what is reconciliation without truth, and who taught us about truth and reconciliation. We know who taught us this, it was Nelson Mandela, it was the founders of what is now a ((bounty?)) republic, an unimaginable thing, and here am I saying, Australia could become an Aboriginal republic.

I can't find a better word because there were 400 nations in my island continent at the time of contact. There is no name that will do. Maybe Aboriginal people will arrive at a name; maybe we can call it 'Koori Republic', the 'Maori Republic', the 'Niangua Republic'. But it can't just be 'The Republic'. It can't be a proto-American republic, because it has to

understand what country it is, and it is not like any other country in the world.

Now, as I said, I'm only speaking for my own mob as a fourth generation Australian, but I want to tell you that I think my countrymen are in pain. They don't admit this to themselves, but if I want to explain the sheer aimlessness of Australian life, why, since the time I was 12 year old, was I trying to get the hell out of Australia. It's because everywhere I looked it said there's nowhere to go.

If you're not going to be a sportswoman, and I certainly wasn't, I was clumsy when I was born, I couldn't even get out of the womb properly, I had to be hoisted out by the ears. But I was also bored by sport, which meant I was a bad person. I knew there was life somewhere, I knew that somewhere over the rainbow, there were books and stuff, and there were paintings and there were buildings. I was surrounded, as are most Australians, you know it's the most urbanised population in the world, by suburbia.

But also I want to explain the lack of creativity. Australians are clever, you know, we do well when we get us out of Australia. We do well when there is lateral pressure, when we're forced into competition; I mean where would the dreaded Blair be without his devoted Hewitt for example. What is she doing there, get out of there girl.

Australians are running research institutes, universities, hospitals all kinds of things all over the world except in Australia. There are one million Australians living in the Diaspora, and in case you New Zealanders feel a bit superior, there's even a bigger proportion of New Zealanders, so you can figure that one out.

Now you could say, that's just because the economy is too small, aha, but what I'd say to you is, the economy will not grow. Why doesn't the economy grow, because we can't imagine how to make it grow. Now what I would say is, we don't have access to our own creativity. The one and only Australian software millionaire has said, "Unless you guys get a handle on IT, you've

had it". You can't go on ripping the guts out of the country and selling it on the open market and expect to get anywhere. Australia is in competition with the poorest countries in the world. Why? Because it produces things like ((oxide?)), produces things like iron ore. Our extraction industry is probably the only one that makes any money, and most of that is made on the metals exchange and made by Rio Tinto.

You know perhaps one reason why I'm standing here is that some of my best friends in England made their first million in the Poseidon Adventure, and one of my best friends didn't get out quick enough in Australia and jumped out of a seven storey window.

I'm sick of the boom and bust story, I'm sick of the way that people go around my country looking for a way to make money quickly and get out, because getting out has always been the key to getting anywhere in Australia.

Why is it we can't think of anything else to do? How much better is the state of Washington? Why does Bill Gates come from Seattle? How does that happen? Now you may say that's just a fluke. Why is Silicone Valley in California? What does California produce; did it expect to make its millions out of citrus fruit? No, they probably wrecked the state by growing citrus fruit. We've already wrecked most of the Murray Basin in one particular area by trying to grow citrus. Why can't we think of anything else to do? Why are Australians not tapped into their own imagination? And I would say, because they are paralysed by guilt, but unacknowledged guilt. They just can't deal with that.

Their lives are an exercise in displacement activity. The sophisticated Australian recreational lifestyle consists in postponing everything to another day. "She'll be 'right mate, be okay", so you tell them, your central river system is collapsed; your river is now closed. The Murray River is now a billabong, "Oh she'll be 'right". And then they find out, "Gees we spent 20 million dredging the mouth of the Murray", 20 whole million. How many flats in London would that buy you? That will give you some idea of the relative size

of the economies. Australian newspapers run whole weeks of articles if somebody has misspent \$8,000, they think it's a big deal.

Why do they think so small, why are they so mean, why are they so envious? And I would say, it's because they're unhappy. Why are they suckers for the worst kind of DIY religion? You know I own a small property 3 kilometres north of the Queensland border behind the Gold Coast, and I have to tell you the entire area is infested with gurus, who are helping miserable people, understand what is wrong with themselves. They offer weekend retreats for the self-obsessed. You never see so much energy spent on anything so pointless.

Why can they not see a wider horizon? Because I would say, because they aren't raise their eyes and look, they feel too inhibited by the thing they cannot say. And then you see, if I say, "You know something, you're really not happy you Australians", they'll say, "How dare you say that, I'll punch your face. How can you tell me I'm not happy", and you say, "Well if you were happy you'd just walk away. Why are you so angry when I suggest that this is not a lucky country, that this is a country under a curse?" And there's really one reason for that.

It's because in a way everybody knows that that's true, and they don't know what to do about it, and yet all the time Aboriginal people are offering them a way out, and this is the reason why I wrote this pamphlet.

Aboriginal people are saying, "We will accept you if you will accept us, if you'll stop imagining that you're superior to us, if you'll stop trying to teach us how we should live, if you'll be at least reciprocal, listen to what we tell you about how you live". And it isn't a question of keeping a neat house. It's a question of keeping an orderly continent, which is a completely different proposition.

So this truculence, this immense self-pity, this superstition all seems to me to be part of this denial.

Now if we actually look then at the current situation, what do we have? We are talking again now of a treaty. Aboriginal people want a treaty, maybe. But the only treaty they're likely to get is one which has been drafted by white Australians. Now isn't that a curious thing.

It's all the time Aboriginal people having to learn our ways, understand our concepts, meet us more than halfway, and in every case they've done it. In every case they've actually studied the rules we lay down, and we still don't understand why it is that Aboriginal people feel so humiliated, so emasculated and it's particularly tough on the men. The women are more resilient. Most of the hunter-gatherer groups, and this is true of hunter-gatherer groups all over the world, I've seen the same thing in North America, are actually being governed, being run, being preserved, being guarded and maintained by the women who will not let go. The men are the fragile ones, and you must know that we lose young Aboriginal men every month, who have hanged themselves in custody and destroyed themselves by some other means, because there is no honourable life.

Now everybody says to me, "Your thing is just words", supposing you call it an Australian nation, it's not just a word, it's a recognition. You want to talk about sovereignty, its sovereignty of the whole nation that means the nation bears their name. You may think it's unimportant, but in fact to people as spiritual as the Aborigines it's really important. It's much more important than being given your handout to buy food or your free medical care or anything of the sort.

Everyone goes on, what about practical help? Practical help led to treating Aborigines like basket cases, and that meant even further emasculation, even further humiliation, and the dreadful, dreadful weight of gratitude where no gratitude is to be expected. What kind of gratitude is involved when you steal everything and give back a pittance, nothing.

So where do we stand now. Well we're now in the middle of a really ancient sit of interactions. You know the Americans granted

head rights to their hunter-gatherer peoples in the 1920's. Australia struggles towards a decision in the Maybo case, which was an easy case for them because it involved an unusual form of ownership within the Aboriginal community. An ownership that looked like Anglo-Saxon notions of ownership, but in fact these are imported notions, and they are limiting notions and they are inappropriate for Australia.

They have led to the current situation, and every one of them has involved systemic misrepresentation on the part of Aboriginal people. Not only that, but Aboriginal people have had to pay white lawyers to conduct their legal actions for reclaim of their ancestral lands. They have cost them so much that they have ended up in debt to more than the value of the lands in question, supposing the lands in question had any value, which was unusual because if they had any value the white man had already annexed them, and one of the things Aboriginal people did very early on, was offer not to contest, what I regard as, fictitious freehold.

People who hold their land as freehold in Australia will keep it. The only land that is even in contention is the land owned by Crown leasehold, and unoccupied lands and some other special cases.

The interesting thing about the Maybo case was the step it made forward, is that it recognised the Aborigines right to grant title. In other words, it recognised an Aboriginal domain of law, but that's as far as it went, and you may be aware that the Government has been trying, in the most mean minded way, to rescind it and also to make it subject to caveats and excisions that would not be appropriate in the case of a legal title.

Since then of course Australia has kicked out the Privy Council and is going its own way when it comes to legislation so that Aborigines don't even now have protection of the common law.

Now this is all a bit detailed and a bit tedious, a bit hard for us to talk about now. I'm going to end up talking to you about this by talking to you about what the actual results

have been, of the white man's inability to care for the island continent of Australia. I don't think John Howard knows as much about the state of Australia as I do. I spend weeks and weeks wondering Australia, just looking with these eyes.

What do I find everywhere I go, everywhere? There are exotic weeds. I can climb to the height of a mountain and I will find some European or South African or South American plant. Now you may say, "So what, who cares". Well I'll tell you so what. These plants have no natural predators, they have no competitors. Some of them are, for the first time in their history, growing in a frost free environment for example.

You may know the plant called Vipers Buglos, some of you may have it growing in your garden. In Australia Vipers Buglos makes an immense mound of vegetation, which dies off piecemeal. You have a great lump of rotting vegetation with the fresh *Echium* on the top. *Echium vulgare* is its botanical name. It never dies, and it spreads itself over miles and miles, for hundreds of thousands of miles of this rampaging plant, which in Europe grows in a community of plants, and needs special combinations of cultural conditions to grow at all.

You may have heard of Paterson's Curse. Paterson's Curse in the north is actually *Verbena*. It grows in huge monocultures for thousands of miles. If I gave you the full list of plants that have laid waste to my country, we'd be here all night and all day tomorrow.

Why are they there? Well they're there because people wanted to create Europe in Australia. They brought their garden flowers and they brought some from outside the country.

My rain forest is choked with *Lantana*. *Lantana camara* is a South American genus, and the unfortunate thing is, because it was imported as a garden variety, it is resistant to all kinds of herbicide, because it's actually a multi-genetic strain and it's everywhere. Everywhere the rain forest opens up, where the light meets the forest floor, this choking monoculture grows up.

It's a disaster, but its only one of thousands of disasters. Throughout the middle of the country, if you actually look at the textbook of Australian grasses, you will discover that Australians imported pasture grasses from every country in the world. Why? Because they wanted to grow their hard hoofed animals, who should never have been there in the first place, faster if possible, so they imported more richer grasses, better grasses with better nutrients. Of these the most successful is probably buffle grass.

Now buffle grass seeds itself like smoke. The seed travels for miles. The entire inland of the country, the semi-arid inland is being colonised by buffle grass. If you're a grazier, that's cool, if you're not a grazier it's not cool at all, because everything else is wiped out by the buffle grass.

But not only that, when the fires come, the buffle grass burns for a long time. Whereas the native grass burn like my hair would burn, poof and they're burnt, the buffle grass burns and burns and burns, and in the thick tussock, the heat builds up and up until it heats the soil and kills the root system of things like the great river gums that are the beauty of the inland. All those wonderful *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* growing along the Fink River, one of the oldest rivers on earth, if not the oldest river on earth, are all menaced by this blasted buffle grass.

I can't tell you how we get rid of the buffle grass. It would be the longest, most expensive war ever fought, and we could still lose it. The devastation of the country is amazing. You have to believe me that there are weeds in every single part of the country, but that's not the only bad thing. Because we cleared that country, some of you may know the water table rose, because we didn't have the absorption of ground water by the trees. The water table rose and brought up with it all the salts that had been held in suspension in the Australian soils for thousands of years. The result is enormous ulcers of salination.

If you fly over Western Australian, if you fly over the weed belt, you'll see these great ulcers. They look quite pretty because

they are colonised with special salt worts, salt tolerant plants which are often very pretty colours, purple and pink, but they are actually great wounds and they are poisoned, and they extend right across the country into the Malley and they are increasing all the time.

There is no way back for salinated land, land salinated in this way.

One of the other things that have happened because of the rising water table is cinnamon fungus, which causes die-back in forest, in chlorophyllous forests in Australia.

Now you may have noticed if you've travelled in Australia, so many of the forest lands, so many of the scrub lands have got these dead branches sticking up, they are the evidence that this fungus, which is related to dry rot is actually destroying the vascular systems of an eco-system so extraordinarily rich, that we haven't even described the things that are in it, and they're already being wiped out.

Nobody knows what to do about it, because with every train that goes through, every lorry that goes through, every tourist who tramps through, the spores of the Phytophthora are carried further and further. And this is a tremendous curse on my country.

Now you may say, "But nobody knew, who knew?" We know now. Everyday Australians are told these stories, what do they do? Nothing, they say... what they said to me was, "We'll all be ruined", said Hanrahan "before the year is out", which is a quote, I think, from a Banjo Paterson poem, that comes from a rather disheartened pastoralist who said, "We're going to go bust". Well in fact more pastoralists were right about that than were ever wrong. Most of our small farmers went bust within a few years of setting up. The banks owned Australian farming from the beginning, and guess who owned the banks.

So it's not just that either, it's not just erosion, which you expect, there is also the extraction industry, and I just don't understand. How can it be right that in the Pilbara, in the middle of the Pilbara there was once a beautiful mountain, and the beautiful mountain had a

special shape, and you can see the shape in some of the later drawings of Rover Thomas, whose name I shouldn't mention because he is a dead person, as an Aboriginal person I'm not supposed to mention his name, but a dispensation has been granted in the case of Rover.

Now he drew these wonderful outlines of this mountain. Do you know what that mountain is now? That mountain is now the largest open cut iron ore mine in the world. And when I asked the pretty blond girl, who was giving me a tour of the mine, first of all I said, "What price are you getting for the iron ore?" she had no idea. But surely it's important. And the next thing is that the iron ore is of such incredibly high grade that in order to be sold on the metals exchange at all, it has to be diluted with low grade ore, which is mad. So she couldn't tell me the price. She couldn't tell me what it cost to actually degrade it, in order to be able to sell it, and then I said, "And when is this mine going to be worked out?" "Oh in 3 or 4 years", "So what do you do then? Are you going to rebuild the mountain?" I knew the answer to the question. Are you going to put Mount ((Welback?)) back? "Oh no, we're going to stop pumping out the ground water, we're going to allow the ground water to fill the crater, and we're going to have a brand new recreational lake".

So people are going to travel a thousand miles from Perth with their jet ski. What an amazing idea, you see because that's the other thing. Australians demand access to the whole of the country in order to use it as recreational space, and it doesn't matter how fragile the environment is, they will still do that. I mean if you, I don't know, do you remember the nickel boom? Well Mount Windara, which is where the nickel was found for the Poseidon Adventure has now been reforested at the enormous cost of \$8.5 million, whinge, whinge. You know how much was taken out of that mine in nickel? One and half billion dollars worth, but they spent \$8 million on re-veging it. They've probably got ((phitoff?)) through there already. But the best thing they have to say

about that is, that it gives you access to some of the finest four wheel drive tracks in the world. And you wonder where can I start?

I want people, I beg them to please care, don't tell me that we've got plenty more rivers when the Murray Darling system dies. We're now returning some water to the river.

The other thing is you see, if you actually look for the rationale behind this wilful destructiveness, you can't find it, because it doesn't make any money, it doesn't make anywhere enough money, and none of it is sustainable, all of it is dependent upon resources that are already in short supply. And you want to say, why do you think this is fair?

Why, for example, the latest thing to happen is that Australia has decided that we want to grow GM cotton. Now we are a bit unfortunate there, because we'd no sooner developed our GM cotton, which was crease resistant, than the Americans stole the technology and beat us to the punch, so that they used that technology and the Australians didn't get the advantage. Nevertheless they were committed to levelling enormous parts of the inland of Queensland around the St George River district. Now you've got to see how they do this because it is staggering. To anybody living in Europe, it would be unimaginable.

This enormous expanse, which has got to be first of all cleared, how do they clear it? They clear it with enormous bulldozers that seem to me to be about as big as this space. Between them there is hung a chain, and these great things like planes go taxi-ing along and the chain pulls down all the trees like a mower. They just go down like fur and they are trees, they are Eucalyptus and Acacia Trees.

The next thing that happens is they come in and they laser level it, because its got to be absolutely flat, its got to be absolutely horizontal and its all done by satellite positioning, and this is happening all over the place, but the part that I was in, where I was most impressed, was the St George River, because why? Because a few years into the project, before they'd even got anywhere, the St George River ran dry. Now there's nothing special about that. The St George River

regularly ran dry, so then you want to ask, whose idea was this? And you know in Australia it comes down to the bottom line, who made money? And the last people to make money will be the Australians themselves. It will be the joint adventurers who got government subsidy to actually do the development, who then sold off the titles of the parts of the development and went away laughing.

Meanwhile the poor people who tooled up, who sold up their own properties, went out to the St George area, dug in hoping to make a fortune out of cotton, why did anybody think they'd make a fortune out of cotton? The Chinese have 75 million hectares under cotton, do you honestly think the St George irrigation area would earn anything like its keep, and if you're talking in terms of sustainability, no.

Now that's one scheme. I could name you 50 more, and every time it's the same question, why don't you care about this? And that's why, in my mad way, I thought; let's just turn it upside down. Instead of the Whitefella telling the Blackfella how he's got to behave in order to have land and survive and be healthy. Why don't we let him tell us?

Why don't we say, this is an Aboriginal country? We're here on sufferance. We're going to earn our place here by understanding hunter-gatherer values. We're going to try and understand sustainability. We're going to try and understand how you can move across the land and live well without wrecking it, without gashing it to its vitals.

It seems to me possible you see. Imagine a destiny where there was a nation that was officially a hunter-gatherer nation, highly developed, full of well educated people, but committed to a hunter-gatherer system of values. Imagine such a thing. Imagine what a role that would be in the international community, just when everybody really needs it. Imagine if all the hunter-gatherer peoples of the earth, if the ((Col?)) bushman, if the Inuit, if the Aboriginal peoples in the sub-continent of

India, if they all understood that Australia would plead their case in the international forum. If they understood that we would... we Australians would give them direction. You couldn't do it now, we'd be laughed out of court as complete hypocrites, but it is an option. It is a destiny that we could have. All it takes is really daring thinking. All it takes is courage.

I trust my countrymen. I believe that they are instinctively egalitarian, I think they are courageous, I think they don't take themselves too seriously; I think their basic feelings are good.

I remember in 1967, maybe 66, I was in England on my Scholarship to Cambridge, and I went to my bank and I saw a sign on the wall that said there was a referendum for citizenship for Australian Aborigines. I nearly fell over, because it never occurred to me that Australian Aborigines didn't have a citizenship, what an amazing idea.

What happened in the event is that 97% of Australian people voted for the Aboriginal people to be admitted to the full rights of citizenship. Australian people will do the right thing if they get a chance, and I think this is their chance. It seems such a mad idea, I mean they say, "Surely it's just a word", there is not an idea on earth that didn't begin as just a word, and I think it's a better word than 'reconciliation'.

What does reconciliation mean? It means Aboriginal people get reconciled to having been done over, and white people reconcile themselves to their guilt. No, no, no, I reckon this is something we can do. We can actually... I can't do it; I can't do it by myself. I dream about what it would be like to nationalise land in Australia, what it would be like to tell the Crown to fuck off, what it would be like to imagine that planting that flag on that beach was no more than that, and that all the rest has been like a bad dream, and that we can redeem the time, if we can.

Its only because Aboriginal people have waited 200 years for us to do it, and people who lived in my country, where I was born, for 50 thousand years, find 200 years not so long. But for me the spectacle of their incredible

suffering, which is mostly spiritual and not physical, is something I cannot live with anymore. And I don't think most Australians can either. And I cannot live either with the devastation of that amazing set of eco systems.

We have an option here. We can take this little embryonic idea and we can work on it, and I think we can do something, at last, truly original instead of jumping up to follow everybody else to war in Iraq and wherever else. Seven times we did that. We can actually think of a new way of going ahead, we can actually start learning where we have spent 200 years struggling to teach. We might actually take on board that we had nothing to teach, and everything to learn.

You know, we're the people who sent explorers to discover a country that was already well known, and instead of asking people where to go, the poor buggars died of starvation and thirst. That's how stupid we have been, but we don't have to go on being that stupid, and if we have the option, it's because the Aboriginal people have offered us that option, and all we have to do is take it. Thank you.

Stephen Corry: Thank you very much Germaine. We have some time for questions. Before we come to them, I have been asked to open the discussion up a little bit, and talk a little bit about one or two other countries, and I'll have to keep that necessarily brief, but I think the point I would make is that, as Germaine has said, the colonial history of Australia is 200 years old, and you can see within that time, the whole spectrum from first contact through massacres, widespread death from disease, paternalism, enforced assimilation and so on and so forth. Now actually you can go to many countries in the world and kind of hone in today on any one of those points.

In Indonesia, the first contact situations are going on in Papua with extreme brutality with tens of thousands of people being killed today, indigenous tribal peoples.

In Botswana, for example, there is a case going on at the moment in the courts to

try and rectify a situation where more or less the last independent hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari, who have been thrown off their land, on the excuse that it was too expensive to provide some very poultry and inexpensive services to them there, that they should actually have the right, those who wish to return to that land, and they do, and the Foreign Minister there told me not very long ago, that “No, no, they don’t want to go back, they want to have Cadillac’s just like us”. Now actually in Botswana you don’t get to have a Cadillac unless you’re a part of the government. So they’re reduced to the same kind of poverty, begging, prostitution, all the rest of it that we can expect.

Now one of the things that I like a lot about Germaine’s book and lecture, I mean halfway through the lecture I thought it wasn’t going to sound quite so optimistic as we finished on. Whereas the book, I think, does have echoes and shadows of optimism about the future, and I think that’s very important.

In my work, one of the key things I have to face when I say my work is to do with trying to defend the rights of tribal peoples, principally their land rights, I am told constantly, well this is a doomed cause isn’t it, and don’t they have to catch up with everybody else and drive Cadillac’s if you’re a Botswanan Minister, and so forth.

But actually it isn’t a doomed cause at all, it’s a forward looking cause, there have been some great successes in the world over the last three decades at getting proper recognition for these people.

Probably one of the most notable was very recently at the end of last year in South Africa, where Khoisan people, relative to the Bushmen called, ((Richtersvelders?)) finally worked their way up to the highest court in the land and forced the government to accept that they had land ownership rights over their land, if they thought they had, before the colonial peoples turned up with a different legal system. And that’s really the first time in the world that a court has recognised that Aboriginal title, Aboriginal ownership of the land doesn’t... isn’t diminished by other people turning up and

declaring that actually the land isn’t theirs at all it’s the colonist’s.

So it’s also obvious that press for change has to come initially from a small minority of peoples, like the anti-slavery movement of 200 years ago and so on and so forth.

Now just before I come to the questions, and I am going to ask the first one myself, I think it is important to realise that there is a good deal of teaching which has to go on. I, about 30 years ago, was with a Peruvian Amazonian Indian, actually from a tribe of people who are noted, used to be noted, for their head shrinking. That’s another story. And we were in the United States, which was the first time he had been out of Peru, and the thing which most surprised him of all, we went up the World Trade Centre, we went to Manhattan, we went around the place, and we found ourselves in a fairly small town in New England, in a supermarket not, by American standards, a very big supermarket. And in this supermarket there were two lines of shelves stretching about the length of this room, in other words, a lot of shelves, containing absolutely nothing but pet food. And he asked me what is all this in these cans and packets and what have you, and I explained, this is what people buy to give to their cats and dogs, and of course he didn’t believe it for a minute, and I think he... there was really nothing I could tell him which would persuade him that I wasn’t, frankly, pulling his leg.

Now we’re going to take some questions. The practice of the house is to take questions in threes and we have roving microphones, and I would ask people to, when they ask a question, you have to tell us what your name is, and what your affiliation is. And I’m, as I say, going to take the questions in threes. I expect there will be a lot of people who want to ask questions.

I’m going to take the privilege of starting by asking Germaine, a lot of people in the world have sat down, as indeed you have with hunter-gatherers, and come away changed, not to say enlightened, by the

experience, but then people say that, they're accused of being romantics. Why is it romantic to sit down with hunter-gatherers and stand up at the end of the process and say, "Well that is something remarkable, unexpected, I've never come across anything quite like that". Why does that make people, do you think, be accused of being romantics?

So that's the first question, so I'm going to take two more questions before we ask Germaine to, and there's a gentleman here, who was undoubtedly the first to have his hand up in the third row.

Ramnik Shah: I am a Fellow of the Society. Now I've come to this subject and I've come to this lecture as a complete outsider, and I hope I can put this to you with a degree of detachment and objectivity.

You've given us a fascinating account in historical terms, you know, how the settlers, the struggles of the settlers and the interaction between the Aboriginals and the outsiders, and now you're talking about a kind of settlement, you say nothing short, really, of Aboriginal sovereignty will do. I think that's ultimately... what it boils down to that, that's what, I think, you are postulating and it means that if people can recognise that they have to live and let live, because you said that historically the burden that the white people have borne on their shoulders is to teach the Aboriginals about modern ways and so on, so they have been forcibly, force feeding as it were, but it hasn't worked because the Aboriginals have receded into reticence.

So if it is a question of live and let live, I'm on your side, and I want to put a proposition to you, would it not be possible to sell your idea to your compatriots on the basis that, look, unlike these other places like Indonesia and Botswana and South America and so on, where also you have struggles between the indigenous and the settler peoples, where space, physical space is an issue. In Australia you don't have that, you have an enormous territory and there is enough for everybody, so you can live and let live.

John Bailey: I'm not a member of the RSA, I'm a freelance journalist, so I'll be very brief.

To lift a depression, Germaine, can you not mention any examples where the proposition you put forward has been enacted, however small, however indiscreet perhaps in relation to parts of Australia. And also is there a case in the world anywhere that you or the chairman know of, where the process that you've outlined in some form or other has been carried through? So we can go away here at least thinking there are possibilities, thank you.

Germaine Greer: Well now, the first thing about whether its romantic to sit on the ground with hunter-gatherer people and come away feeling completely different, I don't think its terribly romantic. I mean when you've thrown your first can full of live witchery grubs into the coals, you generally have a pretty rude awakening. It's not romantic, and it is tough and it requires a good deal of discipline.

I've been accused of idealising Aboriginal society, but I in fact don't. I just refuse to discuss it because I'm following the Aboriginal rule, I speak for my mob, I speak for Whitefellas. I am not going to describe the devastation that is the case in Aboriginal society. There are no... I know quite a lot about it, and I have experienced it at first hand and I have been very frightened and very shocked, but that's not my subject. My subject is my people, and their malaise.

Aboriginal people do teach you some things about patience and endurance, and I guess the thing that I found most impressive, was the massive strength of the women. They made me feel like a real girl, a schoolgirl, and they dealt with things that were truly horrible, and the situations that I've seen them deal with; the senior law women who go to a meeting with the elders about a man whose just cut his wife's throat. I mean this is not easy, this is hard, and its not in the least romantic, its not in the least romantic looking at, you know, the venereal disease statistics or anything like that. All of this is realistic, but

what is important to me is the awareness of country, which brings me to the next question.

Live and let live, a question of territory. Now the thing about Aboriginality is, and I think it's true to say, that only in very rare cases, and they have been rather special, has any Aboriginal group laid claim to any piece of land that belonged to any other group, because it makes no sense. Their identity comes from their country, and it doesn't make sense to ask for anybody else's.

And there is no question of saying, okay we've done that you see, that's exactly what we did do. We said, "Okay you blokes go into the desert". There's a whole kind of Australian redneck who says, "Oh gees, you know, if they live as tribals, if they just live off the land and just not bother the rest of us, we'd let them alone they'd be fine. But instead they come with their hand out and...", and you have to say, "Yes well that's because there's no game left, and that's because the environment is degraded. It's also because you gave them firearms and they killed them all, so that in order to reinstate all of that we've got to go right back to the beginning".

I mean if I owned a desert property now, a semi-arable property, I would grow kangaroos but the other graziers would want my sweetbreads and it would be impossible.

It isn't just a question of live and let live, partly because we don't let anything alone. Do you know something horrifying? I didn't know this till yesterday. In Australia there are 31 uranium deposits earmarked for exploitation, nearly all of them on Aboriginal land. And you know something else, that under the law as it at present stands in Australia, nobody owns the mineral rights under their own land, the same is true in England but it doesn't count that much, but if somebody comes prospecting for some nasty poison on your land, you have to let them do it. 31 uranium leases, that is shocking, and they will be... they will disrupt the environment around them.

In the case of the Ranger Mine, for example, where you know there's been endless struggles to contain the poison to stop the leaching into the rivers and so on of radioactive

tailings and waste and so forth, the town of Jabaroo, where the 25 workers or something, all of these mines have very few workers, where they actually live in a sort of, in what Australians call, the sophisticated recreational lifestyle. It's an occasion of sin for the indigenous people. The kids won't stay away from it, there are all kinds of money sloshing around, there are drugs and so on.

What can we do? As far as I'm concerned, we can't just say, "You Aboriginal people can't have petrol tanks because the kids will sniff petrol". They have to have vehicles; they have to get far enough away from us for one thing.

What we need to do is have a situation where there is something to live for. But for hunter-gatherer peoples who have been expropriated there is literally nothing to live for. They live in the hope of re-establishing their connection with the land, and if we don't do it, there'll be no land to have a connection to because we can't be trusted with it. We're just trashing it all the time.

So it's not a question of live and let live. That would be fine, that would be apatite and we had that, you know, we took black people out of the city and stuck them in a suburb called Mount Druitt where they couldn't be a nuisance. We had, and we put them in reserves.

I am shocked to see how many reserves there were, and they were run by everybody I've ever heard of.

Every religion you've ever heard of, every pressure group you've ever heard of. It's surprising to me that we didn't have, you know, United Paedophiles Incorporated running a reserve. They're absolutely everywhere, hundreds and hundreds of them, government reserves, church reserves. The poor old Aborigines have been corralled, I mean one of the evidences of how bad we feel about all this, is we cannot leave them alone.

First of all we tell them one thing, and they live for 10 years by this rule. Then we change the rule, there's a new native act, and then we decide they're subject to leprosy, so

we start combing all the Aboriginal areas trying to pull out the lepers and stick them somewhere where they can only give each other leprosy and not anybody else. Unbelievable, we just can't do it.

One reason why we can't do it is that they're always on our mind, even when we're saying they're not, they are. We're constantly picking away this thing that we can't deal with.

Now I'm asked about successes. Look, I'd like to say that it was a success when towns like Wilcannia and ((Ningan?)) became black enclaves, but it wasn't. The shop keepers eventually went away, the towns closed down, they became the same kinds of black enclaves that you find all through the outback where you can get frozen mutton chops, you can get roast chicken and booze, booze, booze, booze, always 20 times as much booze as anything else.

I suppose you could say the exploitation of Uluru was a success, except in my view, even though everything that has been done at Uluru has been very beautiful, the tourist centre and all of that, it won't be a success until these idiots stop climbing over Uluru.

Can you imagine people climbing over the dome of St Paul's; I mean it is outrageous to me that they do that. They actually walk; they dangle their genitals over the top of Uluru, which is what it would mean in the body language of hunter-gatherer people. It's not on, it can't be done.

I would like to say to you, I mean the big success story is Aboriginal art, incredible success story, and it is now the cultural flagship of my country. They have done it. Everybody in the world now knows Aboriginal art. Australia has no branding without the Aborigines, this is a success, and this comes out of their creative vitality compared to our inertia. Our inability to have access to our creativity, and yeah, it's a success story, and I do think it's doable.

I tell you, if I talk about this with the young men who work on my rain forest rehabilitation project, they say things like, "Well I feel Aboriginal. I don't see any difference between me and Aboriginal people",

and at least one of them has Aboriginal blood, undeclared but it's there.

Everybody has 'istory and even those of us who haven't got 'istory are allowed to have it. I don't have any Aboriginal blood at all, but I have still been adopted as an Aboriginal person.

I think it's doable, it's doable. They are the most extraordinarily resourceful people. They have reserves of inner strength that I find astounding, and I would have said, when I was growing up at school, that it was impossible, they were dying, look at them, look at them dying, look at these dirty, dirty people scuffling around, look at these prostitutes in the city, look at these drunks, look at this, this.

It wasn't until I was actually in a place that they ruled, which is now too dangerous for white people to go into, because in fact relationships in that part of the world have deteriorated, but I have immense faith.

You see I actually think that in 100 years time, you know, people won't believe Australia was ever British, they'll think they must have been completely mad, but I don't want to go the whole 100 years. Can't we just hop the time to come, can we do it now, come on, it's doable, it will be easier if we do it sooner, do it now.

John Bailey: What about an example?

Germaine Greer: Well I gave you the example of Aboriginal art, which is an amazing success story.

John Bailey: More than one, more than one, somewhere where it's happened.

Germaine Greer: Well I don't necessarily want to go that way; I mean Canada opted for the sub-division routine, so they gave a third of the country, which presumably nobody else particularly wanted, to the Inuit. Now I don't know how the Inuit are going to survive cut off like that in their own enclave, because they're already threatened by all the diseases we've talked about, and I wouldn't mind betting they find running their own enclave terribly difficult.

What's happened in Australia is you see we've managed to criminalise practically every black leader. The people I worked with years ago, Paul Coe, people like that, the black lawyers all have been besmeared in some way. They've mishandled money, they've misunderstood something.

Aboriginal people don't give a shit about money. You give them money they give it away, and they can never produce proper accounts, because they actually don't think it's important. I can remember myself saying, you know, "You know the trouble with you Emily", to the great Emily ((Nuwara?)) whose work is worth more than this whole building, me saying, "You know Emily you don't know the value of..." Of course she knows the value of money. It's a fiction that we believe in and Emily didn't believe in it at all. Start again, rewind, think.

Stephen Corry: Okay can we have a question there.

Toby Boutle: Does Aboriginal sovereignty require an Aboriginal polity, and are there any western liberal values you'd be prepared to give up?

Patricia ((Morton?)): I'm from Willem Gong, that's New South Wales. I think you're very brave. I think that only you could do this, and only someone out of Australia could do this.

I would like to ask you however, most of what your speech was was the 'why', but not enough about the 'what' it means, and also the process, and we have to be very careful. What does it mean in terms of intellectual property rights and in terms of human rights, and in terms of land rights, and what's the process to going towards this. And also what do Aboriginal people think of this?

If we want to make sure that there aren't further inequities, then they need to be involved in the process.

((Craig Donohoe?)): I really liked your talk, and there was just a few inconsistencies that I want you to explain.

Why did you speak at a Royal venue when the kind of Royal institution symbolise

our nation being named unfairly, and also your nation. Also why did so many English people go to Australia and why is it their favourite holiday destination if it's such an unhappy nation.

And can you also explain why there's a high suicide rate of white male Australians and just one more, I don't know if you can explain, but are these conditions, which you talk about, able to produce somebody like Rupert Murdoch, I mean is that... can you explain that as well?

Stephen Corry: Thank you, but before Germaine responds, we're coming up to 8 o'clock, I don't know how... keep going, okay, Germaine.

Germaine Greer: Okay. The question about the polity is a difficult one for me because, one of the interesting things about the situation that we've got is the Aboriginal people are not challenging any of our most cherished illusions. And I don't quite know why.

For example, the whole thing about freehold, now freehold is a historic title established under the common law by usage, but in Australia it was established by a stroke of the pen. Excisions from Crown leasehold were suddenly divided up and sold to all kinds of developers, and they were entitled to sell freehold.

Now if I were an Aboriginal activist, I would eventually, I would have a long-term plan of challenging that freehold, and that would mean that I would challenge fencing, sub-division and so forth, but I should point out to you that this has already happened. I mean if I build a house on my rain forest land, I've got to have a self composting toilet, I've got to do this, I've got to do that. I'm not allowed to do what I please, there's all kinds of interference.

That interference, I think, is in bad faith because the local authority defies all kinds of ecological considerations, and yet it puts a very heavy weight upon individual householders, so it turns the whole thing into

a personal discipline, instead of a national policy, and I think this is deliberate.

I'll make myself a composting toilet, or I might even just shit on a shovel, I might even not make any toilet at all, 125 acres is a lot of place to shit. As all the animals shit there already I might as well shit there too.

So already that encroachment on individual autonomy is being sanctioned in the name of the ecology, but is not being done in any kind of a logical fashion, and wherever there's real money involved, it all falls over. If somebody decides he's going to put in a marina, then out come 70 hectares of mangrove, which is, anyone can tell you what happens to a coast if you remove the mangroves, apart from the fact the mangroves are, if you're a hunter-gatherer people, its one of the most fruitful hunting grounds there is. So that's already going on, and Australians are just going to have to wear that.

They have to wear water restrictions for example. You can't wash your car, think of that for a terrible injustice; you've got to drive a dirty car, gees, and so on, so yeah, of course.

There's no living in the island continent without strict discipline, and the Aborigines are masters of that discipline and they demonstrate it absolutely everywhere. When they move through, everything is left as it was before. Australians are incapable of doing that, you know, they... well I don't have to tell you. When they go broad-siding through sand dunes in their four wheel drives and so on, they cannot leave anything alone, they leave a mark everywhere.

Beaches are for driving on in Australia, and that will all have to change, but it should have changed years ago. It's just that, you know, if you put up a sign saying 'private' in Australia, that's an invitation to somebody to come in.

I actually live next to a national park, and one of the most important things is that people don't swim in the stream because they swim in the stream with insect repellent and sun block and all this shit on them, and the stream is actually a home for Platypuses and blue

crayfish, and they're killing them, and I go up there and video them swimming in it all the time because I want the national park closed. I think most national parks should be closed; they're really not places for people to amuse themselves in.

And so yes, I'm fully prepared for there to be... there already are as well, because I cannot now just travel through other Aboriginal lands whenever I feel like it. I have to do what Aboriginal people would do; I have to have permission to go, because they cannot stand that much traffic.

You know it's very simple. You will have to accept a discipline. If Australia is understood by Australians to be a sacred charge, then they will do what they have to do to protect it. You already do it, you know, you get squirted on the plane, you're not allowed to carry any foodstuffs, you know, I have to surrender my shoes, once my coat was kept in solitary confinement because they said it had scurf, and so forth.

So yes, there will be encroachments on the Englishman's cherished liberties, but there already are, and they might be for a good reason instead of a bad one, just for a change.

Now the process I don't know about. I mean I talk to my friends who work in native title. One of my best friends is Paul McHugh, his father was Chick McHugh who was president of the Maori Land Rights Tribunal in New Zealand for many years.

Paul was trained in Saskatchewan and all over and is now an academic at Wellington and at Cambridge. And so I sit and talk to him for hours about land tenure and what happens when you abolish Crown leasehold, what happens if you nationalise land, what happens then, because what I'd like to do is reverse the flow in the lands claims charges.

We have to claim land, not Aborigines having to claim because it's killing them. I mean it's impoverishing them, and it's wasting their lives and their substance, and the appeals go on forever and so on.

So I've spent hours talking about this. All I want is for someone else to talk about it too. I want people to think, you know, this would be a neat thing to do, we could try this, we could try a test case here, we could try a test case there, we could actually talk about restitution of water rights, or we could challenge mineral rights, or whatever. And we could just go the other way around, so the onus is on us, we pay, not the Aboriginal people pay.

The other one was, why am I talking in the Royal Society of Arts, do you know I have no idea. It was arranged by the publicist for Profile Books and, as an obedient author, I do as I'm told. We could suggest that they change their name to the Democratic Society of Arts, or the People's Society of Arts, or we could sit here tonight and decide to give birth to a new communist party, which would be the first communist party as far as I'm concerned.

And how do I explain the suicide of Australian men? Actually in the essay, which I didn't give you a précis of the essay; the essay is quite different from what I said tonight. I do talk about the extraordinary mortality in Australia.

Australian lifespan is short, even for white people. Australians do commit suicide more than you would expect in a happy country. Now I don't actually think that suicide and sadness are connected in any important way, but I do think that, for example, one of the complicating factors in Australian life that no one will address is alcohol, and alcohol is a very efficient depressant.

A lot of suicides are to do with the neutropenia that results from occasional or even regular alcohol abuse, and in Australia the belief is you can't have a good time without alcohol, well you can only have an alcoholic type good time. And I think that's part of the pathology, its part of settler pathology. You can see it in Ireland, where alcoholism is a huge problem, and you can see how that comes from a post colonial situation.

Then that's multiplied in Australia when all these people arrive there, and don't really want to be there, they're in pain all the time. Wherever they go the ((shabeans?)) spring up

after them and anything that will make alcohol is used to make alcohol, potatoes, grain, anything.

So what do the shearers do when they get their cheque, there's nothing else to do, they go and are lambed down. They give their cheque to the publican and the publican fills them with grog until the value of the cheque is exhausted, and some of them never walk away, some of them die.

Now this is part of our historical pathology, and I think its still there, and I think you can see it in drug use in Australia as well, but I would even say, you know, people who think they've got to go surfing every day are in trouble too. That in itself is a displacement activity and a lot of Australian life is like that because of what I said before, its aimlessness.

I mean I had an aim which was to get the hell out of there. Now I've got another aim, which is to go back to my rain forest principally, not back to the suburbs, which to my mind is like going to the cemetery, but I don't want to go back until it's an Aboriginal country. For me that would be just wonderful, and I am not going to give up hope of that, I'm 65 now, maybe the turn of the century, my century. I'll be run over tonight probably.

Stephen Corry: Well I hope not. We've run out of time.

Thank you all very much indeed. Thank you Germaine for opening a discussion.