NOEL PEARSON AS PROPHET AND PERFORMER: A CASE STUDY OF INDIGENOUS INTELLECTUALS AND SETTLER NATIONALISM IN AUSTRALIA

By

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Abstract

This thesis makes a contribution to the study of intellectuals in the context of settler nationalism from a neo-Durkheimian perspective. My case study ofAustralian Indigenous intellectual Noel Pearson demonstrates the power of intellectuals to shape and contribute to the formation of national imaginaries. Symbolically, Pearson appears as bothprophet and liminal figure drawing on the sacred and profane. His capacities as a performer on the national stage are shown to resonate with features of settler nationalism. This thesis moves beyond the paradigms of political and policy analysis towards a cultural sociology of intellectuals in the context ofnation-building. Symbolic power is shown to be of real significance in understanding Pearson as a political actor and intellectual.It explores the degree of autonomy exercised by a single indigenous intellectual in the political and ideological setting of contemporary Australia. At its broadest this thesis contributes to the study of cultural power in contemporary societies.

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Introduction

A Prime Minister's Eulogy

In November 2014, Cape York indigenous intellectual Noel Pearson delivered a eulogy at the state funeral of Gough Whitlam, the charismatic former Prime Minster who had presided over one of the most controversial governments in Australian history. Pearson stood before an audience of Australia's political elite: present and former politicians, celebrities, musicians, actors, and Labor Party luminaries, and televised live a wider public. Pearson himself was raised in a small Aboriginal mission of 300 people in the remote tropical north of Australia far from the centres of political power. Schooled in the Aboriginal traditions of his GuuguYimidhirr people and Lutheran missionaries he now stood before the nation:

> 'For one born estranged from the nation's citizenship, into a humble family of a marginal people striving in the teeth of poverty and discrimination, today it is assuredly no longer the case.'(Pearson 2014)

A renowned orator Pearson appeared as the successful product of an advancing Australian nation, a symbol of Aboriginal advancement, and a collective representation of how far the nation had come. We are reminded about the highly discriminatory Australia of Pearson's birth, and asked to reflect on the progress of a nation delivered by a visionary reforming government espousing the values of equality of opportunity. 'For people like me who had no chance if left to the means of our families we could not be more indebted to this old man's foresight and moral vision for universal opportunity.' In Pearson's final words, Whitlam is said to be in Indigenous terms 'Australia's greatest white elder and friend without peer of the original Australians'.

The speech was hailed as 'one of the greatest in Australian history' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2014). It reverberated through the media in the following days. Pearson's oratory

weaved the story of his own life with the potential of government in times where government appears paralysed by micro-management. The symbolism of his own life is telling: mission raised in the last days of official discrimination, patriotic student of Australian history and politics, fierce policy reform advocate, land rights warrior, public intellectual and guardian of his GuuguYimidhirr high culture. When Pearson stood before this audience, the pinnacle of his national reach, he stood as a figure of commanding symbolic power to the settler nation.

My contention in this thesis is that in order to grasp the real significance of Pearson as a political actor and intellectual we need to understand his symbolic power, its sources and the context of its emergence. This thesis moves beyond the paradigms of political and policy analysis towards a cultural sociology of intellectuals in the context of settler nation-building. At its broadest this thesis contributes to the study of cultural power in contemporary societies. It asks questions about the autonomy of an indigenous intellectual in the particular time, place and ideological setting of contemporary Australia.

'Up from the mission'[1]

Pearson was born in 1965, two years before the landmark 1967 referendum which gave powers to the federal government to make laws for indigenous peoples. Raised in the small remote Aboriginal community of Hopevale. Established as a Lutheran mission in 1886, Hopevale is situated deep in tropical northern Queensland on Cape York, some 2000 kilometres north of the state capital, Brisbane. Home to various local indigenous languages, of which GuuguYimidhirr is the most dominant, Pearson was raised under the strong influence of both classical Aboriginal traditions and Lutheran Protestantism. He was sent to a high quality boarding school in Brisbane, and later graduated from the prestigious University

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[1]'Up from the mission' is the title of Pearson's collected essays (2009). A mission is a community or settlement established by a religious group. Many Aboriginal communities across Australia began as missions established by various Christian denominations.

of Sydney with degrees in Law and History.

The high points of an era of confrontational Aboriginal activism were the struggles of the 1970s and 1980s, but Pearson did not belong to this generation. He emerged in 1993 during the last, and most public phase of land rights struggle arising out of the High Court's landmark *Mabo* decision, which acknowledged indigenous prior ownership of Australia. At the age of just 28, Pearson played a significant role in the ensuing negotiations as a lawyer and representative of his Cape York community.

In 2000 Pearson self-published a manifesto *Our Right to take Responsibility*, an attack on the causes of welfare dependency and social breakdown in the communities of Cape York Peninsula. From this moment on Pearson became a figure of both controversy and considerable influence on government policy. In 2008 an expensive, and some would say paternalist welfare reform trial based on Pearson's ideas began in four Cape York Aboriginal communities. More recently, Pearson has been a leading advocate of constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples. In 2014 an extended essay on recognition *A Rightful Place: Race, Recognition and a more complete Commonwealth* was published as the current government prepares to formalize a proposal expected to be put to referendum in 2017.

Situating Pearson as intellectual

Noel Pearson is a prominent example of an intellectual who has exercised considerable autonomy to influence indigenous affairs and public discourse for a period of more than fifteen years. This thesis situates Pearson's role in recent transformations of the indigenous political field. The past fifteen years have been notable for a narrowing of indigenous voices in the public sphere whilst the charismatic Pearson captured Australia's

political elite. Pearson was not the only Indigenous intellectual to gain status in this period. Other leaders such as Warren Mundine and Marcia Langton are also figures associated with aspects of a conservative turn after the breakdown of the 'liberal consensus' (Sutton 2009). Langton is an influential anthropologist and public intellectual allied with Pearson and a formidable personality in her own right (see Robb 2011). Figures like lawyer intellectuals Mick Dodson and Larissa Behrendt are prominent, particularly on the political left. Yet no indigenous figure, perhaps in Australian history, has articulated such a comprehensive vision for a national audience with the reach of Pearson. It is this vision which has real cultural power and needs further explanation.

My analysis of Noel Pearson as prophet and performer follows the neo-Durkheimian perspective of Jeffrey Alexander (2011: 2):

> 'strong programs in cultural sociology take off from the notion that between traditional and modern societies there is not a radical epistemological break. Moderns still have their myths and meanings; they are sustained by narratives that move toward an idealized telos, that motivate rather than simply determine, that inspire and not only cause.'

It has been noted that the significance of rituals and performances in contemporary life appear to be increasing, especially in relation to politics (Wood & Tsang 2014: 2-3). Thus, the case of Pearson as a symbolic figure, prophet and intellectual in the negotiation and creation of new narratives relevant to the settler nation is worthy of closer analysis. Following Tsing (2007: 38) I track 'public articulations of indigeneity' by 'those who set the terms of discussion (public intellectuals, activists, leaders) rather than those of ordinary people […] their claims become influential discursive frames to the extent they can gain both a following and an audience'. I focus less on Pearson's relationship to indigenous communities themselves. Though his symbolic power draws upon his remote community origins, it is the public figure that is the subject of this thesis.

Intellectuals and Settler nationalism

This thesis asks questions about the role of an indigenous intellectual in negotiating the vicissitudes of settler nationalism. It seeks to understand how power is exercised, deployed and obtained through an analysis of Noel Pearson as intellectual performer in relation to the political and cultural field of contemporary Australia. As a settler nation, Australia is founded on the dispossession of its indigenous peoples. The place of indigeneity within Australian national life has become highly contentious since the 1960s and indigenous intellectuals have been at the forefront of negotiating this field. Indigenous issues disturb national narratives and cause anxieties about the moral, and sometimes legal, foundations of Australia. Settler-indigenous relations constitute a field of significant cultural complexity and symbolic struggle that is reflected in its distinctive type of settler nationalism (Moran 2002, Pearson 2002).

In the modern world, despite globalization and mass immigration, the nation remains the most politically powerful imaginative orientation, and states, the most powerful actors utilizing and legitimizing their power through nationalism. Much of modern political life - elections, speeches, and commemorations - celebrates and performs the nation (see examples in Tsang & Woods 2014; Alexander, Giesen & Mast 2006).

Modern political and economic life involves huge resources and attention allocated to media management, shaping messages and symbols for broad national and consumer audiences. For Alexander (2011: 3) contemporary societies are difficult social spaces for creating fusion between audiences, actors and texts. The density of critical commentary in real time makes successful performances of power and influence difficult to sustain. Yet the need to create meaning and project out to imagined audiences remains an essential part of modern life.

The life of the nation is also about symbolic struggles. In Australia, struggles between

traditional national myths and narratives derived from racial ideologies and its British heritage have been destabilized by the entry of indigenous peoples into national life since the 1960s. In these symbolic struggles for power, language is central; and intellectuals are specialists in the articulation of narrative myths. Alexander (2011: 198) goes as far as arguing that the difficulties in sustaining the ideals of the civil-public sphere has led to audiences eager for public-intellectual performance. Intellectuals appear equipped to provide the language of solidarity and civil repair. It is this deployment of language, its specific articulation and performance that makes Pearson a worthy case study for the literature on the role of intellectuals in nationalism and nation-building (Suny& Kennedy 1999, Boyer &Lomnitz 2005, Tsang & Woods 2014, Woods & Debs 2013).

The dominant view of Australian political culture is that it has not been sympathetic to its intellectuals. The Australian ethos is said to carry a powerful strain of 'anti-intellectualism' (Pusey 2010). Pearson himself refers to Australia's 'aggressive egalitarianism' (2014) and Kapferer (2011) to 'egalitarian individualism'. This ethos acts as a social leveler and is highly skeptical about social hierarchy. Intellectuals are treated with a cautious skepticism as to whether they can apply ideas in the 'real world'. Collins (1985) has argued that Australia's political culture is 'Benthamite' following the English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham, oriented towards positivism, utilitarianism, legalism and anti-metaphysical. Notably, many prominent indigenous intellectuals are lawyers, including Pearson, Larissa Behrendt and Mick Dodson. Indigenous leaders and intellectuals tend be drawn into policy specialisations and judged on their practical application.[2] In this thesis I treat Pearson as a public intellectual though he is also referred to as an 'Indigenous leader', lawyer or activist. Pearson delivers on many of the expectations of Australia's Benthamite political culture - his reforming zeal, attention to legislative detail, his pragmatism, but he

also plays the role of intellectual visionary which is the main focus of this thesis.

Power and Influence

Although virtually unknown outside Australia, Pearson has become a major national figure in the last fifteen years with considerable influence over the major political parties and many elites from the political left and right. Pearson is a highly contentious figure, equally capable of the compelling and the profane. He can inspire and repulse. His talents – orator, essayist, visionary, politics, policy advocacy – evoke images of a prophet-like figure. Conservative Prime Ministers Tony Abbott and John Howard have championed Pearson's policies and role as a bridge between indigenous and settler Australia. The affinities between Pearson's policies and the neoliberalism and paternalism of the Howard era (1996-2007) have been contentious. His most controversial position is that 'progressivist' rights-focused politics *caused* the degradation of the conditions of life in Aboriginal communities (Rowse 2012: 165). This thesis was provocative coming from a land rights warrior and gained him significant media attention.

However, this does not explain his appeal to many intellectuals and cultural elites who have also been persuaded by his socio-economic diagnoses and intellectual vision (see Manne 2007, Clendinnen 2004, Rothwell 2008).Pearson has received a large amount of attention in recent years both in public commentary and in academia (McKnight 2005, Curchin 2013, Gibson 2009).Though his views have gained the endorsement of much of the political elite, Pearson remains a contentious figure.Some of his policy positions in relation to welfare, child protection and education make him unpopular amongst many indigenous people and parts of the political left.[3]

To the reader seeking more detailed analysis of his policies, or evaluation of his

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[3]Pearson advocates welfare quarantining in exceptional circumstances of child neglect.

politics and ideological positions, I point them to the growing secondary literature or Pearson himself (see Pearson 2009). It is a difficult task to discuss such a political and contentious figure who himself is so immersed in politics, while attempting to retain a degree of normative distance. Whilst political analysis of politicians tends to be more accepting of this distance, the ethical and policy complexities of indigenous affairs in Australia tends to pull close observers, including many anthropologists, into highly politicised analysis (see Altman and Hinkson 2010, Austin-Broos 2011).

In this case study I treat Pearson as a sociologist would any prominent political or intellectual figure. The role of *realpolitik* in his activities is real and plainly evident. Politics inevitably comes into contact with analysis. Pearson's positioning more than his ideologies is the subject of my analysis. I do not adjudicate on those positions rather I seek to understand his repertoire as it interacts with aspects of Australian political culture. I provide the historical and political context of the indigenous political field as background to Pearson's emergence as it serves my attempts to explain and understand the cultural power of an indigenous intellectual in contemporary Australia. I seek to understand his effects, his performances, his words, and their implications for the national imaginary. I do not account for all their ideological and Machiavellian sources, though they will appear where relevant.

This thesis proceeds in Chapter 1 by mapping the Indigenous politics of Australia, and the dynamics of settler nationalism. This chapter provides a brief history of indigenous politics since the 1960s as it relates to national life. I survey the indigenous political field in the 1990s and the crucial transition period of the late 1990s and early 2000s. In charting this transition I attempt to lay the groundwork for a more cultural approach to indigenous intellectual and political life. In Chapter 2 I provide a neo-Durkheimian analysis of Noel Pearson's symbolic power and his status as a liminal public figure drawing on the sacred and

profane. I provide a brief background to his public profile and situate him within the politics of settler nationalism. The thesis concludes with reflections on the relationship between intellectuals, politics and nationalism. Pearson is shown to be a case of an intellectual with a high degree of autonomy to influence public discourse in Australia due to the particular ideological and political environment which developed out of the 1990s.

Methodology

All research carried out for this thesis was library-based through online sources and inter-library loans. I have utilized a large body of Pearson's writings and speeches available online, published in newspapers or in his own books. Many of his speeches are available as videos online on http://youtube.com. A collection of Pearson's writings *Up from the mission: selected writings* (2009) covers the main themes of his agenda. Various long essays have been published in periodicals, all available online (see Pearson 2009, 2014). His numerous essays often published in *The Australian* newspaper were accessed through the Cape York Partnerships website at http://capeyorkpartnership.org.au/articles/. Interlibrary loans were utilized for the background historical information used in Chapter 1.

Chapter 1
Settler nationalism and the Indigenous politics of Australia: a brief history

In this chapter I map the cultural politics of settler nationalism and the indigenous political field. This involves understanding the difficult and changing relationship between indigenous and settler Australians since 1967 but especially since the early 1990s. Firstly, I look at the changing dynamics of settler nationalism and the appropriation of Aboriginality. Secondly, I highlight the instability of the indigenous political field and the changing status of indigenous leaders. Finally, the chapter concludes with an account of the transition period at the end of the 1990s when the 'liberal consensus' is said to have collapsed (Sutton 2009, Neill 2002). This chapter lays the foundations for understanding the emergence of Noel Pearson and the context of his role as performer and prophet in the post-2000 period.

1.1 From 'the great Australian silence' to indigenising settler nationalism: the late 1960s to 1990s

In 1968, one of Australia's eminent anthropologists W.E.H. Stanner coined the phrase 'the great Australian silence' to refer to the absence of any narrative about 'ourselves and the aborigines', and the 'unacknowledged relations between two racial groups within a single field of life' (Attwood 1996: xiv). Up until this point, just one year after the 1967 referendum, Aboriginal people were virtually invisible in national life. They had been absent from accounts of Australian history and subject to a long history of paternalism, assimilation and protectionist state policies. From the late 1960s, encouraged by Stanner, Aborigines, who were "out" of history for a century

and a half came back into history with a vengeance (Attwood 1996: xiv). The 'new Australian history' sought to correct the silence, as did archaeologists and anthropologists working on land rights claims across the continent. The new history rewrote the history of frontier violence, assimilation and colonial relations. 'Aboriginal history', that written by aboriginal people, also emerged from the 1970s and 1980s challenging conventional historiography and the traditional national narratives.

Land rights and debates about 'stolen generations'[4] contributed to Aboriginal issues becoming the major and most visible racial conflict on the national agenda. The issues and the new thinking contributed to the destabilization of Australia's traditional national myths from the 1960s onwards (Hirst 1978, Ward 1978). Broome (1996) argues that without these new meta-narratives arising out of the 'new Australian history' and 'Aboriginal history', the High Court's landmark 1992 *Mabo* decision would not have been conceivable. The *Mabo* decision overturned the idea that Australia was *terranullius*, a legal term meaning 'nobody's land'. It recognized the native title rights of a Torres Strait Islander people of whom Eddie Mabo was the lead claimant. With *Mabo*, history rushed onto the national agenda, 'there was a growing conviction that a sense of past is integral to any sense of the future' (Attwood 1996: vii). Never before had indigenous issues been given so much attention at the centre of national political life. The ensuing debates were intense and stirred national anxieties. The legal and moral foundations of Australia were openly questioned and contested.

With the anxieties caused by *Mabo*, especially for conservatives who desperately tried to resist national land rights legislation, there was also another

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[4]Stolen generations refers to children removed from their parents between the years ... Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made an official apology in February 2008 to the victims of the stolen generations. Prime Minister John Howard had controversially refused to apologise following the Bringing them Home report.

process, that of 'indigenising settler nationalism' (Moran 2002). A new development came to prominence:

> 'during the 1980s and 1990s, governments, intellectuals, and media commentators also emphasized the importance of the Aboriginal narrative for Australian national identity. An 'indigenising' form of nationalism highlighted the way that Aboriginal culture gave historical and spiritual depth to the nation, and rooted it more firmly in the Australian continent' (Moran 2011: 2161).

Aboriginality started to become a 'symbolic substitution' (Morton 1996: 119) for the role that Australia's British origins had formerly performed. Of course, amongst neither settler or indigenous Australians were these narratives uniformly accepted. The terms by which indigenous peoples themselves could control these debates were highly constrained and contested.

I follow Moran (2002) in focusing on the features of 'settler colonialism', and more specifically 'settler nationalism' instead of the decolonizing nationalism of non-settler colonies and former colonies theorized by Fanon and Memmi. Moran (2002: 1013) argues:

> 'settler nationalism is driven to give some account of, and to come to terms with, the dispossession of the indigenous. Indigenous claims to land and other indigenous rights in the present undermine, threaten or complicate settler associations with land. [..] a new form of indigenizing settler nationalism provides for one form of such accommodation.'

Liberal democracies like Australia, Canada and New Zealand are susceptible to the 'politics of embarrassment' (Dyck 1985:15). Indigenous claims are morally powerful in societies which proclaim the virtues of equality and democracy. The history of colonial dispossession, discrimination and violence is a blight on societies proud of their liberal traditions. The power of indigenous claims involves 'generating sympathy and support among non-native populations, both internal and external to the

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country' (Trigger 1999: 477). The relative wealth of settler nations also makes material disparities highly visible and the subject of ongoing media attention. The success of 'Indigenism' as an internationally successful movement has been its ability to extract concessions from states that are not always consistent with the classical liberal ideals (Niezen 2003).

Indigenous issues tend to be seen as the issue holding the country back from reaching its true potential, or from realising itself as reconciled or complete. Current Prime Minister Tony Abbott recently referred to the need to remove "the stain on our soul" (Kelly 2015). The language of salvation and redemption is a central feature of this new relationship. This type of language gained momentum in the 1980s and 1990s driven by intellectuals, politicians and high profile Australians (Attwood 1996). In 1991 this culminated in a decade-long official reconciliation process driven by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. Thus, a strong feature of settler nationalism is that the 'sympathy, mourning and sorrow in relation to [its] history, demands reparation and reconstruction through recognition and incorporation into national identity' (Moran 2002: 1014). Such is the power of this redemption narrative, anthropologist Gillian Cowlishaw argues that the 'struggles of indigenous people to develop their own forms of modernity were hampered by a stifling and disempowering national sympathy' (Beckett et al 2004: 315).

Between the late 1960s and 1990s the 'great Australian silence' was eroded but the entry of Indigenous people into national life has created a new set of challenges over which they have limited control. Given the constraints of liberal democratic processes, Morton argues that 'Aboriginal peoples only prospect for getting what they want is in the aboriginalisation of that process, which, in a liberal

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democracy, must partly entail an effective mobilisation of its discursive regimes of representation' (Morton 1996: 132). The politics of embarrassment is one powerful discourse in these symbolic struggles. So is 'symbolic opposition' (Trigger 1999: 477) where attempts are made to suggest that features of indigenous society are superior to the dominant society (eg. with regard to environmental protection). Anthropologist John Morton (Morton 1996: 132) is more circumspect about the potential of these strategies noting the almost total dependence of indigenous people 'on ongoing concessions and recognition from white Australia, […] in other words, aborigines and their heritage will continue to belong to the nation'.

Struggles over the meaning and legacy of colonization and its violence are at the centre of elite conflicts over Australian national identity (see Manne 2001, 2003). Considerable struggle during the 1980s and 1990s unfolded as new indigenous narratives disturbed Australia's relatively comfortable national identity. Conservatives claimed that new identity politics threatened the unity of the nation [eg Howard footnote]. The liberal individualist view assumed the dominant society could be culture-blind (Taylor 1994). In this view, citizenship is universal and the dignity of the individual recognized by a neutral state was enough.

Despite the ensuing struggles, known as the 'history wars' (Macintyre & Clark 2004), the settler-indigenous relationship is now broadly recognized as 'unfinished business' by supporters of indigenous people and many conservatives. The current conservative government is committed to a referendum on constitutional recognition of indigenous people. These developments can be seen within the dynamics of settler societies analysed by David Pearson (2002). He notes (2002: 989) three interconnected processes of citizenship common to settler societies: the aboriginalization (of aboriginal minorities), the ethni□cation (of immigrant

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minorities) and the indigenization (of settler majorities). Another view, that of Patrick Wolfe, is the idea that the invader becomes reduced to seeking salvation from the dispossessed in search of kinship with the native; 'The coloniser can become the legitimate heir and successor to the colonised' (Wolfe in Morton 1996: 133). These themes will return in the following chapter when I consider how Pearson has managed and articulated the settler or post-settler nation.

1.2 The rise and decline of the 'national' Indigenous leadership: 1990 - 2004

The 1967 referendum marked a major turning point in relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. The referendum approved constitutional changes that allowed the federal government to make laws for indigenous peoples. Prior to 1967 and the establishment of the first Department of Aboriginal Affairs in 1973 there was little notion of 'indigenous affairs'. Policymakers, especially the newly formed Council of Aboriginal Affairs (CAA) (1968 -1974) were concerned about how an indigenous leadership and intelligentsia would emerge to help deliver on the promise of a new era of federal involvement in indigenous affairs, one in which self-determination would be a central guiding principle.

Tim Rowse (2000) has provided the essential account of the thinking of key policy intellectuals during this period as they grappled with the complexities of the interaction between indigenous politics and Australian modernity. For former Reserve Bank chairman and long-time indigenous policy intellectual H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs, the greatest challenge of his involvement in indigenous affairs was the 'need for government to encourage the formation of an indigenous intelligentsia which could adapt traditions in order to rise to new challenges' (Rowse 2000: 32). Implicit in his

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assumptions were that non-indigenous Australia itself should have an interest and role in the development of this intelligentsia; that an intelligentsia would be essential for the 'transition', or at least adaptation, to modernity; and that the intelligentsia would be a crucial bridge between indigenous and non-indigenous worlds.

Almost half a century later, this vision has been realised. The very notion of 'indigenous leaders' emerged as indigenous people entered national political life. In the 1960s and 1970s a generation of leaders was influenced by the civil rights movements in the US, fighting against various manifestations of racism and discrimination. They were also heavily involved in land rights struggles in various guises across the continent. Leaders were expected to be representative voices for their people and guide governments and citizens in the difficult predicaments of settler-colonial relations. Today there is a diverse indigenous intelligentsia incorporating a broad array of people in academia, the arts, the public service, non-government organisations and the private sector.

Public intellectuals are amongst the most visible public figures in the national political arena. Indigenous intellectuals such as Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton, Mick Dodson and Larissa Behrendt are close to the centres of power and public debate. Arguably, they receive more sympathetic attention than other intellectuals, a trend observed in the US regarding black intellectuals (Michael 2000). Their views are often sought out by media and politicians on the highly symbolic tension of indigenous-settler relations. John Michael could easily have been speaking about indigenous intellectuals in Australia when he described African-American intellectuals as playing "a large role in the dominant cultures' imagination as representatives of, and interpreters for, a race that still occupies a special and especially vexed place in the nation's imaginary".

Anthony Moran (2002: 1028) notes that "Aboriginal leaders wield a level of moral and political authority, and have a presence in the mainstream media as respected political commentators, unimaginable before the 1960s. This was especially evident during the 1990s where indigenous leaders […] made important public contributions to debates on social justice, land rights, the stolen generations and the reconciliation process." Morton notes (1996: 120) that senior leader Lowitja O'Donohue was seen as a 'mother of the nation' during the 1990s. By this time politicians were having more direct and public interactions with indigenous leaders. Bennett (1999: 43) notes that when Pearson criticized the Howard government in 1997 for its amendments to native title legislation, John Howard's immediate response on talk-back radio represented the 'changed nature of Aboriginal participation within the political system'. Prior to the 1990s these kind of public exchanges were less common.

The 1990s were arguably the highpoint of indigenous visibility on the national stage. Three features of this period were the reconciliation process, Mabo debates and the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). These factors combined with the new politics of multiculturalism and the right-wing politics of Pauline Hanson's *One Nation* party gave indigenous leaders and issues unusual prominence.[5]

One of the main means by which governments have facilitated a 'national' indigenous leadership has been through various models of representation, advisory boards, committees and councils. Each has provided platforms for leaders of varying power and visibility. No settled model has been enduring and it remains a contentious

[5]Pauline Hanson was elected to the Federal parliament in 1996 on a platform standing against indigenous rights and multi-culturalism.

issue today. [6] Earlier examples included the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) (1973-1976), and the National Aboriginal Conference (1977-1985). The most significant body was ATSIC (1990-2005). Neither the National Indigenous Council (2004-2008), elected National Congress of Australia's First Peoples (2010-present), nor handpicked advisory boards, such as the Indigenous Advisory Council (2013-), have any formal powers. The post-ATSIC bodies are less visible and more limited in scope.

ATSIC was the most significant national body with a notable impact on the public's perceptions of settler-indigenous relations. ATSIC was established in 1990 by the then Labor government of Bob Hawke (1983- 1991). It was a dual organisation, both a representative body and responsible for 'culturally appropriate' service delivery formerly delivered by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. Crucially though, it was still dependent on government funding and its budget subject to ministerial approval. As with all such previous bodies it was plagued by issues of design, representativeness and executive autonomy. It suffered from multiple accountabilities – indigenous people, taxpayers, governments, clients – that were difficult to delineate from government responsibilities. However, ATSIC certainly had more formal influence on indigenous affairs than any preceding or subsequent body.

The Hawke and Keating government strategies were to promote an indigenous political elite with resources, prestige and influence (Rowse 2000). Nevertheless, observers have noted that there was a large gap between the reality of ATSIC and the expectations placed upon it (Finlayson 2003: 17). Jull (1997) argues that the well-intentioned Hawke government exaggerated the significance of ATSIC's powers. It

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[6]A proposal has been put forward by Noel Pearson and others for a constitutional change that would ensure a consultative body

was judged as *the* experiment in self-determination despite many key service delivery functions remaining with various state and federal departments such as education and employment. At the time it was abolished, ATSIC did not have fiscal responsibilities in health or education, two of the key targets for overcoming chronic Indigenous disadvantage (Behrendt 2004: 26).

From its beginnings conservatives were more likely to air concerns that ATSIC was a quasi 'black parliament' and promoted secessionist sentiments. It came under considerable criticism and given its shared responsibilities with government, lines of accountability for socio-economic conditions were not clear. But the discourse of failure assigned to self-determination was pushed by the Howard government from 1996. The credibility of the indigenous intelligentsia was under threat. For Rowse (2000: 221), the Howard government manufactured a 'spectacle of indigenous delinquency'. Various scandals amongst the ATSIC leadership received significant media coverage. Indigenous organisations were publicly rebuked by regulatory bodies for accountability issues. Indigenous leaders were now national figures and with this came, 'unavoidably, public tests of their political worth for which there are no precedents in tradition' (Rowse 2000: 222).It appeared that there was a price for the new public visibility that came with entry into national political life.

Following the critical 'In the Hands of the Regions' review in November 2003, and with the support of the Labor Party, Prime Minister Howard declared that 'the experiment in elected representation for Indigenous people has been a failure'. (Neale 2014) Despite the obvious complexities of accountability that were part of government-ATSIC relations, the major parties came to the bipartisan position that it should be abolished. This bipartisanship considerably depoliticised the issue and the

end of ATSIC was met with little resistance or public concern. The Indigenous leadership had risen to the heights of visibility and formal influence in the 1990s. Though it took until 2005 before ATSIC was abolished, the Indigenous leadership had already been considerably weakened by the end of the century.

1.3 The end of 'liberal consensus': circa 2000

In 2000, respected anthropologist and linguist Peter Sutton delivered a keynote lecture at the Australian Anthropological Society annual conference entitled 'The politics of suffering: Indigenous policy in Australia since the 1970s' (Sutton 2001). In this lecture, the veteran of decades of land claims research questioned all the assumptions of the prevailing policy framework. In 2009 he published a book of the same title but with a different subtitle 'Indigenous Australia and the end of the liberal consensus' (2009 [2011]). In the book Sutton claims that the 'liberal consensus' on indigenous affairs, formed between 1968 and 1974, broke down around 1999-2000. Sutton understands the liberal consensus as:

> [Aboriginal] communities should be free of mission or state governance, self-managed through elected councils and relatively autonomous. Land rights would ensure their inhabitants security of tenure and, where possible, a source of income. Traditional culture would be encouraged, not discouraged. Pressures to assimilate to a Euro-Australian way of life were racist and should be curtailed. Liberation, not retraining ... would lift people's self-respect and pride, and enable them to embark on a new era in which the quality of their lives would improve. There was an expectation that collective decision-making would be based on a regard for the good of the community. Health would improve through better access to services and a power shift from government health agencies to those who came to form the Indigenous health industry. (Sutton quoted in Rowse 2012: 163).

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For Jon Altman (2004) the bipartisan phase in indigenous affairs began in 1972, with the election of the Whitlam government, and ended in 1996, with the election of the Howard government. Reconciliation, land rights and ATSIC had been the key institutions of the Hawke and Keating Labor governments. Each was gradually abolished or abandoned under the Howard government. Certainly, the election of Howard was the beginning of the end. But as the new century begun, it was not partisanship that was the dominant feature of indigenous policy, but disillusionment with the failure of governments to make inroads on socio-economic crises.

Australia went from Aboriginal Affairs Minister Robert Tickner's view that 'Mabo is probably the most important moral and ethical issue of our time' (Attwood 1996: xxxii) to the bipartisan dissolution of ATSIC in 2004. The Howard government claimed to be about 'practical outcomes' not symbolism. Socio-economic crisis and corruption had de-legitimised existing indigenous affairs arrangements and the leadership. The discourse of sympathy noted in relation to the redemptive aspects of settler nationalism slide into pity for indigenous communities and consent to increasingly paternalistic policies. Critics emphasised that a sole focus on socio-economic factors marginalised 'adequate political representation and the recognition of Indigenous rights such as self-determination' (Altman 2004). Indigenous people had more voice and visibility in modern Australia but they were also more at the mercy of Australian governments willing to intervene in 'practical' and more interventionist ways than had previously been imaginable.[7]

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[7]In 2007, the Howard government launched the Northern Territory Emergency Response in response to reports of extensive child abuse across Aboriginal communities in the Northern

Under the weight of socio-economic crisis, the 'politics of suffering' and Noel Pearson's own pronouncements regarding the breakdown in social norms since the 1980s and 1990s, a new phase of indigenous affairs emerged which had significant implications for its leaders and intellectuals. The 'politics of disenchantment of indigenous policy' (Sullivan 2011) compelled indigenous leaders to deliver on 'practical matters'. With the end of ATSIC and the Howard government less interested in engaging with indigenous leaders, the indigenous political field had changed. In this void, a small number of voices, intellectuals like Pearson who were not damaged by the decline of ATSIC, came to prominence. Some leaders like Mick and Pat Dodson and LowitjaO'Donoghue maintained their high public standing. Others like Pearson, Behrendt, and Langton, were, by virtue of being intellectuals, anointed spokespeople by the nation and media at large.

By the time of ATSIC's dissolution one might have asked who would want to be an indigenous leader in this new political environment. Integration into national political life had been a mixed blessing. In late 2014, Rachel Perkins, daughter of one of Aboriginal Australia's most famous and outspoken figures, Charles Perkins (1936-2000), stated that 'Anyone who chooses to be an Aboriginal leader has to be mad' (Perkins 2014). She was defending Noel Pearson from recent criticisms in relation to his bullying reputation. This did not endear her to many Aboriginal people who were supporters of her father's highly respected legacy. This points to the tensions and dilemmas that indigenous leaders must deal with as they negotiate the national political stage and indigenous politics. So dependent on the nation to listen, and without institutional or representative support, it was the capacity to negotiate the

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Territory. The 'intervention' as it is known colloquially involved extensive welfare quarantining and seizure of Aboriginal townships.

symbolic struggles and discursive regimes of the public sphere that had become so

essential.

Chapter 2
Noel Pearson as prophet and performer

Having established the key features of contemporary Indigenous politics in the previous chapter, I now detail Pearson's public background, and his role as a prophet and performer of the settler nation. This, I argue, is as much a source of his status as his policy positions and political alliances. I utilise Jeffrey Alexander's approach to performativity, and symbolic power as it has been applied to political life and public intellectuals (Alexander, Geisen& Mast 2006; Alexander 2011; Alexander &Jaworsky 2014). At this level, we find the power of meaning and symbols interacting with the cultural politics of the Australian nationalism.

Political sociology, following Weber, and working in the realist tradition, emphasises force, interests, materiality and discourse (Tsang & Woods 2014 :2). However, in the analysis of indigenous politics there has been little explicit focus on the theatre of indigenous actors and their relations with the political sphere and nation. We can learn more about the way words and performance are enacted. Any understanding of the struggles for power within a liberal democracy needs to be able to accountfor the considerable efforts expended in the discursive and symbolic struggles of imagining and articulating nations.

2.1 Pearson's Public Background

A brief account of Pearson's public background is required to help contextualise the events, alliances and material contributions to his public status. As

the young Cape York representative in the native title legislation negotiations he had his first significant engagement with political power with the Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating (1991-1996) in 1993. Young and confident with degrees in law and history, he was evidently at ease with the national attention sitting alongside older indigenous luminaries such as LowitjaO'Donoghue and Mick Dodson. Indigenous leaders had to negotiate legislation that would be accepted by conservatives within parliament amidst a sceptical public. Never before had indigenous leaders received so much media attention and been promoted by the federal government.

The native title negotiations were tense: indigenous people had an historic opportunity to negotiate native title legislation with a sympathetic government. For pastoral interests, mining companies and political conservatives native title appeared to deliver property rights on the basis of race and was a threat to the unity of the Australian nation (Goot&Rowse 2007: Ch. 3). These were formative experiences for Pearson. His works draw on various experiences from this period, how to handle the sensitivities of the national public sphere and the *realpolitik* of the highest levels of power (see 2009: Talking to the Right). He recollects stories of desperate political stunts during the negotiation of native title (2009: Talking to the Right) and harsh political lessons in the 'art of the possible'.

The 'liberal consensus' had been under attack for some years by the Howard government when Pearson delivered a series of widely discussed public lectures and released his self-published manifesto *Our right to take responsibility* (2000). The manifesto is a comprehensive attempt to account for the historical position of indigenous Australia. It provides a critique of indigenous affairs and lays down the groundwork for future policies. It is choreographed for maximum impact and readability; 100 pages in large font, clear headings outlining a holistic account of

indigenous affairs, colonisation and the urgency for radical new thinking. It is one of the clearest early examples of Pearson, 'the performer' developing an audience and stage for himself.

These early performances established a critique focused on the causes of welfare dependency and a rethinking of the historical determinants of disadvantage and substance abuse. Pearson rejects the 'symptom theory'[8] of substance abuse and blames the 'cultural Left' for causing much of the social breakdown in Aboriginal communities during the self-determination era. He delivered his 2000 Ben Chifley lecture (2009: The Light on the Hill) to an audience of Labor party luminaries in which he laid down a stinging critique of Labor and 'progressivist' politics for its failures to commit to the class predicaments of indigenous people with its excessive emphasis on 'rights'. His attacks on 'progressivist' approaches to welfare dependency, substance abuse and the breakdown of social norms in indigenous communities were entirely consistent with the 'practical' agenda and neoliberalism of the Howard government.

By his own account, Pearson had begun to turn himself into a figure at the intersections of traditional left-right political divisions. Although there seemed to be good reasons to regard him as a figure who moved to the political right, Pearson has made his own political categorisation a subject of discussion as much as commentators and his controversial policy positions did. In fighting for land rights, Pearson had been known as having sympathies with the Left. Despite his attacks on the left, Pearson (2009) argued against the view that he had moved to the Right since 1999. This refusal to be categorised has helped make him an ideologically unorthodox

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[8]'Symptom theories' treat problems such as addiction as symptoms of other problems as opposed to problems in themselves.

figure. The tensions within his agenda make him a liminal figure and contributed to his symbolic power.

Pearson's Platforms

In the early 2000s Pearson mounted his critique against existing explanations of indigenous disadvantage and social breakdown in Indigenous communities. Many of Pearson's writings begin as lectures delivered to a wide range of audiences, including Labor Party events, right-wing think tanks and writer's festivals. The majority of his essays are published in the Rupert Murdoch-owned national broadsheet *The Australian*. In the period 2004-2011, 135 out of 146 essays or speeches were published in the *Australian*. At least another 13 essays or speeches were delivered in the period 2000-2003. Long form *Quarterly Essays* (2009, 2014) on education and constitutional recognition, and his collected essays *Up from the Mission* (2009) were published by the left-leaning publisher Black Inc. Major profiles and interviews on radio and TV have been common throughout the entire period.

Pearson has clearly had support from powerful media outlets sympathetic with his agenda. *The Australian* has been criticised for its heavy promotionof Pearson and his allies such as Indigenous anthropologist Marcia Langton or former Labor Party president Warren Mundine (Manne 2011). Political scientist Robert Manne has described the approach of this newspaper in support of Pearson as 'uni-vocalism' (2011: Bad News). The newspaper is highly regarded for its coverage of indigenous

affairs, but this is offset by its crusading approach that silences or attacks views on indigenous affairs opposed to Pearson.[9]

By 2004 Pearson's welfare reform oriented agenda had helped secure the establishment of his own think-tank - the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (CYI) - equally funded by the Queensland and Commonwealth governments. The CYI allowed him a platform to develop ideas for public consumption and policy advocacy, as the number of published essays during the 2004-2011 period demonstrates. Further, the think-tank gave him an institutional support for developing policy reform proposals for the Cape York region. The CYI is guided by a set of development ideas called the Cape York Agenda - influenced by the 'capabilities' approach of Indian development economist Amartyr Sen.[10]

Pearson notes that the majority of his work involves policy writings on substance abuse, welfare reform, employment, housing and education, and 'an intense engagement with Australia's and Queensland's political leadership' so as to 'precipitate state and commonwealth legislation that otherwise would not exist' (2009: Introduction).As I will demonstrate, Pearson takes on the role as a prophet and articulator of the nation through his performances, theory, and commentary, however, we cannot discount the considerable policy-based orientation of his activities.

The material and ideological factors behind Pearson's power and influence are obvious to see: a government-funded think-tank built around himself, the support of the Rupert Murdoch owned national newspaper and policies consistent with neoliberal and conservative governments. Yet Pearson's real power also lies at the

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[9]See Manne(2011) in regard to attacks on indigenous lawyer and intellectual Larissa Behrendt who was subject to an ongoing campaign by *The Australian* against her following a minor twitter controversy.

[10]The 'capabilities' approach is outlined at http://capeyorkpartnership.org.au/game-changers/cape-york-institute/

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symbolic level in the national political sphere. Alexander (2011: 135) overstates his point but it is prescient: 'the factual status of issues is, per se, relatively insignificant in the struggle for power'. Politicians and intellectuals are in a battle of symbols; 'words and images matter'. One must perform *and* be convincing. Pearson is a virtual politician operating through set performances, tight media management, speech writers, and the repetition of key messages (eg. 'our right to take responsibility', 'the radical centre').[11] Although, never having been an elected politician, Pearson's role as director of CYI gives him a certain freedom from direct public scrutiny, and an institutional support for developing ideas and policy proposals.

Filling the legitimacy gap in Indigenous affairs

Pearson operates in an environment where Indigenous policy is plagued by 'disenchantment' (Sullivan 2011) and the 'politics of embarrassment' in relation to what are often described as Fourth World social conditions in Aboriginal communities. It is a continual blight on governments and the nation domestically and abroad. Governments are desperate for solutions to indigenous socio-economic crises while at the same time, they lackenough legitimacy to implement policies in remote indigenous communities. Basic policy assumptions of the welfare state have been challenged in indigenous contexts. Such are the cross-cultural challenges anthropologists have described remote communities as 'ungovernable spaces'(Peterson 2010).

Pearson's active agenda of reform trials sets him apart from much of the discourse of government failure. In this regard, Pearson's *Cape York Welfare Reform*

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[11]It was revealed after the Whitlam eulogy that former *Australian* journalist Patricia Karvelas has contributed to Pearson's speech writing.

Trial is his flagship policy.[12] Significant support has also gone into education reforms appropriate for disadvantaged children. These trials are subject to detailed evaluation but the details tend to be technical and difficult to address in the mainstream media.[13] For his critics, the well-funded policy reforms are not given due public scrutiny, suggesting that there is a degree of blind faith in his agenda because of his high profile[14] (Altman 2011). Pearson's network of Cape York organisations is seen by some to receive an excessive amount of funding available to the region.[15] But for governments struggling to deal with socio-economic problems and little local legitimacy, detailed proposals from local leaders are highly attractive.

Much of the world of policy advocacy is backstage. Commentators have revealed some of the ruthlessness of the politicsinvolved behind the scenes (Koch 2012, Neale 2014). In the following sections, I emphasise the power of Pearson's performance on the front stage, what people actually see, hear and read from the man himself. Pearson commands power because his voice and language has consequences in the public sphere. His symbolic capital, developed through years of policy advocacy and theorising, has a considerable domination over indigenous policy debates much to the chagrin of many indigenous leaders (Maddison 2009)[16]. Arguably, he is the most significant indigenous leader to fully exploit the possibilities

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[12]Four communities are involved in this trial. Local *Family Responsibilities Commissions* are established by leaders in each community to provide support to families for meeting their children's basic needs and attending school. The commission has the power to enforce support services and penalties, including suspension of welfare.

[13]For example, despite the centrality of welfare reform to his agenda, the KPMG evaluation reports have received little media coverage.

[14]Martin (2001) is an anthropological critique of Pearson's welfare proposals.

[15]See the Cape York Partnerships website for details of the organisations associated with Pearson and his brother Gerhardt Pearson. http://capeyorkpartnership.org.au

[16]Maddison (2010) includes interviews with a cross-section of various indigenous leaders in which Pearson is regularly discussed. Pearson himself declined to be interviewed as did his close ally Marcia Langton.

of the national stage, utilising his skills as an orator, would-be prophet and political operator.

2.2 Crisis, Prophets and liminality

The existential crisis of Indigenous peoples

Following Woods & Tsang (2014), I discuss here, the way social performances form, affirm and dramatize the constitution of society. Pearson articulates and performs a crisis of dramatic proportions to the nation, one with socio-economic and spiritual dimensions. As discussed above, Pearson came to attract much public attention through his pronouncements on the 'breakdown of social norms' in Cape York. His 'tough-love' position on welfare dependency and substance abuse contributed to his early public reputation. But Pearson also resonates with his audience, especially the political elite, due to his articulation of the 'spiritual' dimension of Indigenous dilemmas. As Alexander (2011:5) maintains, leadership needs poetry for true success and legitimacy. Policy solutions to socio-economic crises do not lead to inspiring visions; in the world of the mundane - policy design and implementation - there is little scope for stirring words and uplift.[17]

Pearson presents a dramatic picture of the existential threat to the cultural vitality of indigenous peoples faced amidst the forces of the majority Australian society.

> 'the continued existence of the Aboriginal Australian ethnicities is threatened by our status as unrecognised minorities in our land, our apparent inability to

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[17]Pearson notes the dour message of the Labor government's (2007-2013) headline policy 'Closing the Gap' (ie. Socio-economic indicator gaps).

maintain our Australian languages in the face of such adversity and the extremity, numerically speaking, of our minority status'.(Pearson 2011)

Pearson sets himself the task to invite the majority culture society into understanding the existential dilemmas of minority peoples. Narrating the example of prominent Arnhem Land leader GalarrwuyYunupingu, Pearson states the burden of 'existential angst of the tribal leader who fears for the future of his people is harrowing' (2014: A Rightful Place). For him, 'the truth is that I am prone to bouts of doubt and sadness around these questions […] but I have hope'. (2009: Radical Hope).

Whilst Australian citizens have struggled over the moral status of the nation, the 'cultural survival' issue has had limited national resonance despite the prominence of land rights struggles. The deeper meaning remains abstract for many Australians. Few prominent leaders have been able to communicate to a broad audience the drama of remaining a distinct people, and the dilemmas of cultural and language survival. These fears are not new but their articulation and reach to a broad audience is.

The issue of constitutional recognition of indigenous peoples has been at the centre of Pearson's agenda since the 1990s. He maintains the view that indigenous cultural survival will not be resolved favourably without 'recognition' and state support. Pearson articulates the problem as one belonging to *all* Australians.

> 'The song lines of […] central Australia are also the heritage of non-aboriginal Australians. It is this culture that is the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Australia. It is these mythic stories that are the Australia's Book of Genesis' (ARP bicultural vision). The true meaning of the commonwealth is that Australians realise the connection between identity, cultures, languages and lands of the continent.'(2014: A Rightful Place)

He reinterprets the use of the word'commonwealth' attempting to expand its symbolism beyond the formalism of inherited British institutions to include indigenous values that are distinctly Australian and belonging to the continent.

Pearson puts this in Gellner's (1983) and Anderson's (1983) terms, though within a settler-colonial setting: indigenous high culture – songs, ceremony and place names - must become codified, stored and transformed if it is to be transferable in modern education systems (see Pearson 2009). The survival of indigenous high culture is for him an *Australian* dilemma; it belongs to the nation. He invites the nation into ownership of the indigenous challenge by making analogies between the high culture of western societies and those of Indigenous Australia. The selection of words is important here; he refers to the survival of 'Australian' languages not 'Indigenous' languages. Recognition becomes a means of relieving the existential threat to indigenous culture and a means of inviting the settler nation to indigenise itself.

The prophet as symbol

The anxieties and existential crises of the settler-nation then demand solutions and this, calls for heroes. The role of the modern intellectual has been cast by historical sociology in terms of the need for prophets and vision in a world of perpetual change and metamorphosis (Weber 1947, Eisenstadt 1982). Alexander (2011: 198) emphasises the performative prophet over the Socratic truth-teller – 'public intellectuals need to connect with, and speak on behalf of, the great narrative myths of our time, to sing about the possible triumph of progress, to strike chords of national, regional and ideological myths about equality and democracy'. This image of the modern prophet in contemporary democracies equates with the kind of expectations placed on indigenous intellectuals in the post-settler nation. Intellectual are expected to provide road-maps, act as carriers of civil discourse, creators of ideals,

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bearers of projects, and in the Australian context, provide redemption and reconcile the nation.

The current Prime Minister Tony Abbott has referred to Pearson as a prophet and I suggest that we should not take this suggestion lightly. His symbolism is powerful; born to humble beginnings in a remote Aboriginal community as well as being an intellectual closely connected to the highest levels of political power. His public performances often draw upon his life experience of growing up in a Lutheran mission, the experiences of his ancestors, the violence of colonisation, and protection by Christian missionaries. We get glimpses of his community life, visits to the traditional lands of his ancestors, hunting trips, and reflections on the survival of his culture.

Pearson lives in Cairns, a small city in tropical north Queensland, which acts as a regional hub for many surrounding Aboriginal communities. He never gravitated to the metropolis except for his education and briefly for work after graduation. His policy work is all associated with Cape York Aboriginal communities. In the Whitlam eulogy, Pearson tells the story of giving Whitlam a tour of his village and discussing with him the state policies that impacted on his community's life. We are told of the conversations with business and political elites who have been invited for tours of his lands. The symbolism of his remote upbringing 'up from the mission' and his ongoing work remains symbolically powerful for a nation whose foundational myths are associated with the settler relationship to nature, the 'bush' and the 'outback' (Hirst 1978, Ward 1978).

Pearson's symbolism is also as the prototype of modern Aboriginality, equally at home with the European Enlightenment as he is with the high culture of his people. He is a strong advocate of biculturalism and the idea of 'orbiting' for young people

seeking to remain connected to their traditional communities and engage with modern economic life. Pearson (2004) provides his own example of completing the highest quality boarding school education and hunting with spears on his traditional lands on school holidays: 'I can enjoy the best of both worlds. I can speak the Queen's English and GuuguYimithirr'. The vision he provides is that the seemingly intractable socio-economic crises in indigenous Australia can be resolved satisfactorily without having to make excessive sacrifices in either ones-traditional cultural practices or access to modernity.

In the public sphere, Pearson appears as an 'organic intellectual' closely immersed in the cultural everyday life of his upbringing. For John Michael, the 'spectre of the organic intellectual' haunts minority group intellectuals, for the problem of how to be, or adequately represent, 'the people' is unavoidably full of tensions and irreconcilable tendencies (2000:23). The black intellectual is for him 'tethered to a burden of representationality'. Indigenous intellectuals face constant challenges to their legitimacy. For peoples whose situation is one of transition or expected transition, or where the destination is not agreed upon, leaders are faced with constant legitimacy challenges. In a third world context, Ernest Gellner (Merquior 1981: 232) referred to thisas the Moses situation: the dilemmas faced by leaders attempting to persuade their followers to complete an arduous journey without losing their legitimacy.

For Alexander (2011: 197) being a public intellectual is about performing as if one were universal; 'being a public intellectual is symbolic action, a matter of becoming […] a "representative man"'. This role is acutely present for the indigenous intellectual. One's authenticity and ties to community have to be affirmed, worked on, reconciled with the direction that an intellectual life might lead. Thus, indigenous

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intellectuals would not appear to be the 'free-floating intellectual' of Mannheim (1936), able to be socially unattached. Rather, they are duty-bound to be representative if they are to speak with any expertise about the vicissitudes of settler colonialism.

Pearson's public profile as an 'organic intellectual' sits in tension with his status amongst indigenous communities at the local and regional level. His representativeness is highly problematic within indigenous communities. This is a common problem in Indigenous communities more broadly, where localism and kin-based loyalties are well-known features of community life. Pearson suffers from significant questions about his legitimacy amongst indigenous peoplesAustralia-wide and in his local region of Cape York (Maddison 2009, Martin 2001). Some indigenous leaders have greater problems with his elite-orientedstrategy than the substance of some of his proposals (eg. Behrendt). Others are very critical of his broad agenda because it has come to overshadowother alternatives from public discussion (example required). However, this mixed support amongst indigenous peoples has done little to reduce his impact on political elites and the general public, who appear receptive to a prophet-like figure.[18]

In his speeches and writings Pearson summons the authority to speak on behalf of the Cape York region rather than his specific home community – Hopevale. Pearson relays his work to the nation at large from a Cape York 'we', 'our people' or 'my mob'. By 'we' he is referring to the various language groups and communities of the Cape York Peninsula. For Bourdieu (1991) this is a subtle form of symbolic domination that drafts the audience into a potentially false 'we' and a subtle way of

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[18]Pearson has been at the centre of recent debates about constitutional recognition. His personal position on the issue received media coverage in April 2015 (Martin 2015).

imprinting new impositions of representationality into everyday speech (also see Hearn 2012). Although, Pearson's writings and speeches often refer to Cape York peoples, his influence often provokes indigenous leaders to complain that he is speaking *for* them (Maddison 2010). Pearson often tries to defuse his own personal role in summoning the collective work of his reform agenda. Pearson's access to national media and capacity for well-articulated messages makes him fly well above local level indigenous politics, which are often beyond the public eye. His symbolism as a prophet belies his attempt to diffuse his own role in the policy and political process.

Pearson as sacred and profane

Emile Durkheim (2000 [1912]) drew attention to the sacred and the profane in social life. Neo-Durkheimians have shown the ways in which particular meanings and symbols are contested, replaced and established in the national 'collective consciousness' (Woods & Tsang 2014: 10). I show that the power of Pearson as a symbol is that he embodies a delicate tension between the sacred, mundane and profane. These make him a liminal figure and add to his power. As in relation to his politics, he cannot be easily categorised symbolically. Challenging orthodox categories is a central component of his discourse. He has developed a theoretical instrument for negotiating dialectical tensions between idealism and realism - 'the radical centre' - which provides his vision with a telos and synthesis (Pearson 2007). He situates the crises of Indigenous peoples and the Indigenous-settler relationship within an overarching telos. The nation is invited to enter into the process of reconciling these tensions. The destination is not provided, but he plays the role of

Socratic truth-teller identifying the obstacles and an intellectual instrument for finding synthesis.

Two images of Pearson illustrate his position within the public imagination. The first is of Pearson the performer, delivering a eulogy to a national audience for former Prime Minister Whitlam. The second image is of Pearson the profane, the policy negotiator and Machiavellian ruthless political operator. These snapshots capture the Pearson image at its extremes—sacred and profane—and the tensions within an enigmatic figure. Bernard Giesen (2011: 291) has highlighted the contrast between intellectuals as specialists in 'matters of identity, for the encompassing whole, […]; for the sacred, in contrast to those who excel in profane technical knowledge about limited areas of this world'. As I show, Pearson does not fit Giesen's either/or image, for he is a figure who spans the worlds of the sacred *and* profane.

As the Whitlam eulogy demonstrates, Pearson is at his most potent, as an orator where words can be performed. Performance and ritual are at the centre of modern political life (Woods & Tsang 2014). They are expressive and highly stylised, facilitating the creation of theatres, drama and the communication of meaning. Performances can fail but they can also transform (Alexander 2006). For Durkheim (1995 [1912]), performances and ritual introduce an emotional element of increasing, enhancing and sustaining group solidarity.

State funerals, especially for former Prime Ministers, offer a unique stage for performers. The funeral of Gough Whitlam was a significant moment of reflection for the nation due to his disputed legacy. Pearson's success in this performance was to make the stage simultaneously his own, that of Indigenous Australians, the nation and

the legacy of a former Prime Minister. Each potent symbol does not fall out of balance. This is Pearson the performer, utilising the stage of a funeral to inject a modified interpretation of the dominant narratives. He is focused on a story of progress, not the profane, and these are powerful words for the settler nation burdened by its 'original sin' of aboriginal dispossession. For Alexander (2011) this is the moment of *fusion* that performers seek to connect audience, speaker and script.

Pearson captures the moment by weaving the legacy of the Whitlam government with his own life and Indigenous progress more broadly.

> My home was an Aboriginal reserve under a succession of Queensland laws commencing in 1897. These laws were notoriously discriminatory and the bureaucratic apparatus controlling the reserves maintained vigil over the smallest details concerning its charges. Superintendents held vast powers and a cold and capricious bureaucracy presided over this system for too long in the 20th century[19]. In June 1975, the Whitlam government enacted the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Queensland Discriminatory Laws Act. The law put to purpose the power conferred upon the Commonwealth Parliament by the 1967 referendum, finally outlawing the discrimination my father and his father lived under since my grandfather was removed to the mission as a boy and to which I was subject [for] the first 10 years of my life. (2014b)

The narrative of the speech goes against much of the pathologised discourse of indigenous dysfunction that dominates media coverage of indigenous policy, and to which Pearson himself has contributed. Despite his own attacks on central components of the self-determination era, in this speech Pearson rehabilitates the key successes of this era from the dominant discourses of failure and crisis. There is a triumph of what the state can do for the disadvantaged; 'the equalities of opportunities

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[19] The notoriously paternalistic Queensland Act effectively made Aboriginal people 'wards of the state' giving the state the powers to control freedom of movement.

afforded by the Whitlam program'. It is also a celebration of ambition and vision trumping modern political managerialism.

Another feature of the eulogy is the way Pearson cultivates a space for himself and indigenous peoples outside the orthodox political divisions, a space of exception that works to heighten the sense that he is providing insights from a unique and authentic vantage point.

> 'Raised next to the wood heap of the nation's democracy, bequeathed no allegiance to any political party, I speak to this old man's legacy with no partisan brief.'[20]

The speech hints at the role of the governments; he is careful not to use overly identifiable partisan terminology preferring the safer language of 'equality of opportunity'.More politically identifiable language risks alienating sections of his audience. This is a speech of symbolic power about the entry of indigenous people into citizenship, the possibilities of reform-minded governance, about the opportunities made available to him through the reforming government. He also uses the expression 'this old man' as an ode to the indigenous custom not to mention the personal names of recently deceased people. This was arguably Pearson's most transcendental moment as a performer.

The public image of Pearson leading his people and speaking to the nation contrasts with the man who on his own accord spends the majority of time formulating legislation, detailed reform proposals and intensely negotiating with public servants (Pearson 2009: Introduction). This is Pearson in the realm of the mundane, designing new school curricula, translating Shakespeare into GuuguYimidhirr, and meetings with public servants and politicians. This role is given

some expression through his policy advocacy in his writings and constant references to the ongoing 'work' Cape York communities are undertaking. This work contributes to his legitimacy at the level of government.

The other less flattering image of Pearson is of the profane, one which he occasionally mocks describing his image in the eyes of his enemies as 'right-wing fascist Lutheran mission mongrel' (2007b). The mundane is a major contributor to his policy level legitimacy but it is the dual roles of visionary and the practitioner of the profane arts of realpolitik that contributes to his enigmatic profile. In the midst of intense native title negotiations, he has admitted to pretending to support legislation on national TV in order to scare conservatives into rejecting it (2009).

The figure presented by journalist Tony Koch (2012) has built a reputation behind the scenes for his belligerent and abusive treatment of journalists, bureaucrats and commentators. [21] His policing of his message appears to extend beyond the seducing and convincing towards harassing and attacking. A radio interviewer had a glass of water thrown over her (Koch 2012). Pearson reportedly threw his own brother down a flight of stairs (Sutton 2009b). Persistent anecdotes of this type sit uneasily with his role as an indigenous prophet synthesising the moral dilemmas of the nation. He sometimes presents himself as tormented by the burden of his many roles, 'I have my moments of despair' (2009: Radical Hope). These candid moments only increase the tensions within himself that are available to his audience. They provide a personal intimacy to the stakes of the drama he articulates

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[21]My brother, Dominic Kelly, a Phd candidate in Politics recently received an abusive phone call from Pearson following an April 2015 opinion article about Pearson's approach to the indigenous constitutional recognition debate.

A liminal figure

The sacred and profane images of Pearson produce a figure of great tension and liminality. Equally he presents the dilemmas of indigenous people in relation to the settler nation as a drama of tensions. The notion of the 'radical centre' has been a key part of his agenda (2007a). He uses the Hegelian language of dialectical tensions to articulate to his audience the kind of process that he sees unfolding between nation and indigenous people, as well as in finding policy solutions. These tensions have not always been clear to audiences within left and right ideological frameworks. Pearson's strategy has been to bring these tensions out through his own personal narrative, his reform agenda and its meaning for the nation.

The lesson of *Mabo* and native title was that winning land rights also divided the nation in half to the detriment of Australia's political culture. His career since has been about avoiding this situation. His idea of the radical centre is a strategy which he advocates for indigenous politics in the face of the majority nation. This approach says it is better to seek out positions which capture 80-90 percent support than 51 percent. It also includes a vision of reconciling theory and practice and this underpins his view of what 'progressive', as opposed to 'progressivist' politics looks like. It must carry the people and determines great leaders from poor ones. The radical centre is achieved when pragmatism and idealism are brought into titanic struggle and reach their point of highest tension (Sutton 2009b). This is Pearson's telos instrument, his way of channeling tensions, both those of social transformation and those within his audience. It avoids ultimate commitments but invites the audience into a potentially consensual space.

Pearson goes to great lengths to make spaces of exception for indigenous issues. He seeks new languages, new syntheses of ideas to move the status of

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indigenous people along its telos. Tsing (2007: 38) notes the dynamism of indigenous politics: 'its strength is its refusal of pre-given political categories – and refusal to back down to demands for strict definitions'. Niezen (2003) also points to the unique role of 'Indigenism' in challenging many of the assumptions underlying the limits of state sovereignty.

Pearson is keen to avoid ideological straitjackets and claims to be 'promiscuous' in relation to political ideologies.He liberally borrows from different political traditions, openly declaring the relevance of Adam Smith, Johann Gottfried Herder, Edmund Burke and class analysis for indigenous peoples. He reinterprets the feats of Prime Minister Keating for delivering native title legislation that drew upon *progressive, liberal and conservative* thinking. As in the eulogy, Pearson wants to appear to the public in speech and writing as an outsider at distance from partisan politics. Yet simultaneously he is the extremely schooled observer friendly with various prime ministers, and capable forays into realpolitik. Of course, we know his political engagement is far more intense than this and perhaps he would likehis audience to believe in its unavoidable necessity. The intellectual in him attempts distance through his words while heavily engaging in it in practice.

As Tsing(2007: 39) discusses, the use of 'publicly recognizable genres' is essential for engagement with nation-states even where the objective is to carve out new spaces for thinking about indigenous voices. A Pearson example follows: 'Indigenous Australians now want our equal liberty. We want the freedom to take responsibility' (2014a: A Rightful Place). This is a common type of phrasing repeated in many of his speeches and writings just as a politician would stick to their script for the daily media. It is designed to appeal to various political groupings; 'equality' for the social democrats; 'freedom' for the liberals, 'responsibility' for the conservatives.

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On its own, the phrase is somewhat nebulous in reference. In the context of his broader agenda, it performs two tasks. Pearson uses the language of different major political groupings within Australia, and redeploys the language in ways argued to be relevant for the specific situation of indigenous peoples. Secondly, this work with words is in effect designed for clearing a conceptual space for indigeneity within the public sphere. To do this it has to be made intelligible to a wide audience of conflicting political commitments.

Pearson's style is that of journey with his audience. He walks his audience through his thinking, reflecting on where it had come and where it needs to go.Successes and failures are reflected upon, the dialogue is ongoing as though in a long-term conversation with a committed audience. He is in the midst of a long and ongoing thought process, he is confessional, admitting the lengths his position compels him to go. We observe him in process, on a journey: 'we are working', 'I have been thinking', and 'this problem has bothered me for sometime'. The discourse style is 'we need a discussion' or 'the discourse on … is weak'. There is unfinished business for the nation: 'the question of aboriginal people's place within the Australia sovereign state has been all but disappeared from the national agenda'. The effect is creating an audience more intimately connected to a people of symbolic significance and a leader's attempt to articulate the post-colonial dilemmas of his people.

2.3 Articulating the post-settler nation

Pearson's role as prophet is closely tied to his articulation of a reconciling post-settler nation. Nations, especially forward-looking settler societies like Australia, must continually reproduce themselves as 'national' communities (Moran 2011,

Pearson 2002); they must be continually imagined in discourse. The role of elites and intellectuals in nation-building has been a major feature of the nationalism literature (**refs**). In nationalism studies, it is claimed, intellectuals 'appear to have the greatest agency in the shaping of national understanding, propagating the values of the nation, disciplining the people internally, and enforcing the rules and boundaries of the constituent people' (Kennedy &Suny 1999: 2).

My contention is that Indigenous intellectuals are also uniquely placed to reflect and articulate on the position of the nation, and increasingly so in recent decades. Kennedy &Suny (1999) suggest that intellectuals have the most autonomy in periods of initial nation formation where there are not settled understandings of community. Rather it is in periods of openness that intellectuals have opportunities to shape national identities. For these authors 'the role seems to decline as the intellectual becomes more organic and the nation is based ever more on the everyday sense of what it means to be of the people' (Kennedy &Suny 1999: 402). The status of Australian nationalism has been relatively unstable over the past twenty-five years with Mabo, multiculturalism and Islamist terrorism all contributing to significant debates about Australian identity.

From the end of the 'liberal consensus' around 2000 through to the controversial Northern Territory 'Intervention' in 2007 was a phase of considerable confrontation with Aboriginal socio-economic conditions. Pearson became a pivotal figure during this phase in the'truth-teller'role, publicly declaring the social dysfunction of his hometown to the nation.Pearson does not embody the pure Socratic intellectual, outside everything, embodying some ideal of the responsible intellectual with general commitments to justice and truth (Alexander 2011). Nor does he adhere to Benda's (1927) ideal of intellectuals as a class-in-themselves 'duty-bound to avoid:

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nation, class and race' or Mannheim's (1936) 'free-floating intellectual'.In Giesen's (2011) typology of intellectuals Pearson is on balance an articulator of the nation more than an 'intellectual as the voice of traumatic memory'.

Nations have to be imagined and articulated into existence (Anderson 1983); not just reconciled or claimed but articulated, felt, expressed, narrated. Although Pearson's truth-teller role has been most prominent, the visionary has never been absent. More recently, Pearsonhas been referring to a three-part conception of Australia's national heritage which has been taken up by the most recent Prime Minister Tony Abbott:

> 'There is our ancient [Indigenous] heritage, written in the continent and the original culture painted on its land and seascapes. There is its British inheritance, the structures of government and society transported from the United Kingdom fixing its foundations in the ancient soil. There is its multicultural achievement: a triumph of immigration that brought together the gifts of peoples and cultures from all over the globe – forming one indissoluble commonwealth. […] We stand on the cusp of bringing these three parts of national story together – our ancient heritage, our British inheritance and our multicultural triumph – with constitutional recognition of indigenous Australians. This reconciliation will make a more complete commonwealth' (2014: A Rightful Place)

The vision is simple at one level though interesting in another because it replaces the culture-blindness (Taylor 1994) of liberalism and its institutions with a far more ethno-cultural language: indigenous, British, and multicultural. He speaks of the nation as if these elements are crystallising, 'becoming' and 'on the cusp'.

As a nationalist Pearson is closer to 'thicker' notions of national culture over 'thin' notions of proceduralist political culture advocated by post-nationalists,

including Habermas (Calhoun 2002).Anthropologist of Cape York Peter Sutton notes that Pearson:

> "is first an Australian writer, a national intellectual of public affairs and of history. The other layers of his identity - his family, language group and local community, and his regional and state ties - are all present, but seldom dominate. Instead, the fundamental thing that reverberates most in Pearson's political philosophy is his passionate defence of national cohesion and moral coherence. Indigenous peoplehood plays a role - but as one of many layers of identity, rather than as a basis for balkanisation or disengagement.
> Pearson worries about the future of Australia as a nation-state, and about the integrity of the social fabric. He sees that the pursuit of identity politics can risk structural and social division." (Sutton 2009b)

For Pearson, the fate of his peoples, and their ultimate recognition, are fatefully entwined in the nation. The nation must therefore be a part of solving the problems of social crisis and reconciling the first peoples with the majority society. His audience are actors on this stage and have roles to play.[22] In Apter's (2006: 222) terms Pearson is the stage master organising actors in his 'political theatre' and 'converting the audience into the play itself'. Pearson offers a way out for the original sin of the settler nation by bringing the nation onto the stage. He encourages a vision of the indigenising settler nation. Pearsonpredicts the continuation of the indigenising process noting that, increasingly, Aboriginal-affairs policy will become "a barometer for political decency" in Australia (Sutton 2009). In this prediction he accepts and reproduces a view of indigenous affairs as in close proximity to the morality of the nation and which he therefore seeks to articulate and shape.

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[22]For example he encourages non-indigenous people to learn an Australian language in order to contribute to their survival. This is notably ambitious given the extremely low numbers and that many indigenous people do not speak an indigenous language (see Pearson 2011).

Conclusion

Intellectuals, politics and the nation

This thesis makes a contribution to the study of intellectuals and nationalism from a neo-Durkheimian perspective. Noel Pearson is an excellent case study in the power of intellectuals to shape and contribute to the formation of national imaginaries. Following Rowse (2000: 219) I have framed his prophet-like figure 'within a wider narrative: the changing approaches of settler-colonial liberalism to the integration of a colonised minority into national political life'. Features of settler nationalism, outlined in Chapter 1, also make the symbolic figure of Pearson possible. Few intellectuals exhibit the kind of symbolic power outlined in the preceding chapter. This thesis establishes a case for intellectuals' performances as 'constitutive of the nation itself, [as] active agents providing new visions and languages that project a new set of social, cultural and political possibilities' (Kennedy &Suny 1999: 3).

In the field of nationalism studies, modernists and constructionists have, in general, confirmed a strong role for intellectuals in the formation of nations, highlighting their roles in providing the poetry, myths and narratives on which national identities are claimed (Kedourie 1960, Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm& Ranger 1983, Anderson 1983). This raises the issue of whether there has been an excessive attention to the position and contribution of intellectuals in modernist/constructionist approaches to nation-building (Suny& Kennedy 1999: 383). My thesis suggests that Australia's settler nationalism and the position of Aboriginality is a context in which intellectual performance can and did have a unique impact.

By focusing on performance and the sacred and profane aspects of Pearson's prophet-like symbolism, this thesis contributes to recent developments inspired by Gramsci (1971), Bourdieu (1977, 1991) and Foucault (1980), that increasingly focus on 'the place of intellectuals within the production of culture, especially of public knowledge of social identity and belonging' (Boyer &Lomnitz 2005: 109). In research since the early 1990s, reviewed by Boyer &Lomnitz (2005: 109) 'intellectuals appear in these studies as social actors who are relatively privileged in their capacity to articulate schemes and settlements of cultural knowledge and difference'.

More specifically, this thesis is situated within the performative-turn initiated by Jeffrey Alexander and his collaborators (see Alexander et al 2006), as well as offshoots in nationalism studies (Woods & Tsang 2014, Woods & Debs 2013). Political processes clearly remain infused with the imagery of ritual and performance. The mobilisation and projection of meaningful symbols is essential to political struggle. Modern life still requires its ritual-like activities for binding collectivities especially in the democratic struggle for power. Symbolic action has moved from ritual to theatre (Turner 1982), and modern politics involves highly stage-managed performances. The public sphere is a stage – 'a symbolic forum in which actors have increasing freedom to create and to project performances of their reasons, dramas tailored to audiences whose voices have become more legitimate references in political and social conflict. (Alexander 2011: 49).

Performances for large anonymous audiences like nations cannot construct nations *ex nihilo*. They must draw upon existing materials that audiences can relate to. They must possess relatively simple cognitive and moral frames. Pearson's tripartite view of the nation - Indigenous, British and multi-cultural - is one such example.

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Coming from an Indigenous intellectual, it also recognizes the legitimacy of the invader/settler within a post-settler nation. Putting the case strongly, Suny& Kennedy (1999: 393) argue that nations 'come together and understand themselves as a nation only with the efforts of intellectuals and political elites that bind disparate social and cultural pieces together, dissolve differences within the community as much as possible.'

The political divisions of the 1990s in which the politics of conservative John Howard and Labor Prime Minister Paul Keating symbolized polar extremes, one can mount a tentative case that national identities were malleable because they were unstable. Although, there were also hardened divisions, I suggest that categories were open to redefinition and that the simultaneous processes of indigenizing nationalism and discourses of indigenous dysfunction, powerfully voiced by Pearson, created new interpretative frames for understanding the indigenous/settler relationship. The sacred (indigenization) and profane (indigenous social dysfunction) elements of these processes were reinforced by the liminal figure of Pearson himself. He was both authentic eye-witness and a considered meditator on the spiritual status of the nation.

The unusual constellation of events in the 1990s which made indigenous peoples more visible than ever before confronted a disenchantment with indigenous affairs by 2000. This was a moment where intellectuals, and not just Pearson, could play a heightened role in issues that reflected on the national imaginary. Indigenous institutions had been delegitimized or abolished. Pearson gave a voice and vision out of this impasse. As Boyer &Lomnitz (2005: 113) state 'the elite cultural status and meditational opportunities afforded certain intellectuals guarantees that their visions of social belonging and identity will influence and even channel social imaginations more broadly'. Pearson articulated the crisis and became the symbol of its resolution.

He asked the public to buy into a vision and provided a detailed road-map of policy reforms.

Public figures, who are also very political, face great difficulties in creating broad national audiences beyond their ideological allies. Their messages become easily associated with partisanship and can easily break down as inauthentic. As an indigenous intellectual, Pearson has been able to successfully remove himself from any rigid association with an ideological position. Many have branded his politics in particular ways, usually with the Right and his connections to conservative politicians. Nevertheless, his vision has continually subverted an easy dismissal of his politics on ideological grounds. Boyer &Lomnitz (2005: 113) note that 'intellectuals appear to embody certain dialectical contradictions and incommensurabilities normally associated with modern nationalism and its social and political formations'. In Pearson's case, dialectical tensions are his modus operandi. As the 'liberal consensus' broke down at the end of the 1990s Pearson stood out as a figure embodying both dilemmas and their solutions. He possessed the capacities to articulate and perform the dilemmas in a time of crisis and he symbolized the synthesis of the dialectical tensions in the settler-indigenous relationship.

Although this was not clear during the land rights struggles of his early career, Pearson is not an oppositional intellectual in the mould of an Edward Said, Antonio Gramsci or Julien Benda. Giesen (2011) sees intellectuals as closer to resistance than politics per se. It has already been noted that Pearson maintains very close relationships to political power while attempting to position himself at a distance from partisanship. The dominant institutions are not in question but their effectiveness for

indigenous people is challenged. The issues revolve around appropriate inclusion, recognition and integration into national life.

Pearson's voice is heavily situated within Australian political history. His voice is distinct in performance and content from the dominant frames of international indigenous movements (see Niezen 2003). Pearson operates as a political realist focused on states and national legitimacy. As Tsing (2007: 39).argues, despite the importance of international connections in indigenous politics, 'the nation continues to be the locus of political negotiation; […] to make a difference, indigenous leaders must address the nation-state. They must use cultural and political frames that are comprehensible within the nation'. Pearson's writings and speeches are performed strictly for an Australian audience, which explains his lack of profile outside Australia.

As to the future for Pearson and his vision, Suny& Kennedy (1999: 405) argue that 'the centrality and visibility of the intellectuals… dissipates with the acceptance of the national framework by broader layers of the population'. As processes become more social and less political, intellectuality becomes dispersed and naturalized. Will this be Pearson's fate? In a recent essay Pearson ambiguously suggests his public status, at least in relation to his close relationships with Prime Minsters, is close to its end (Pearson 2015). There is a suggestion here that he is well aware of the unique political field he has inhabited and that it will not last.

Success in many components of his agenda is far from secure. At the level of policy, his most controversial welfare and educational reforms are not assured of success. Given the complexity of socio-economic development he may be afforded

some patience. At worst, his policy program could be discredited and fall out of favour with governments. His enthusiastic advocacy of constitutional recognition could fail at referendum. These would be significant marks against his reputation. In that case he could become discredited as merely a leader associated with the conservative and neoliberal politics of the Howard era. If this is the case Pearson may appear as an intellectual who legitimated new types of state intervention into indigenous lives. However, the indigenizing settler nation is likely to need figures like Pearson for some time yet.

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