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# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT *and* EDUCATION *in the* 1991-2000 AUSTRALIAN RECONCILIATION PROCESS

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### ■ Abstract

In 1991, the Australian Parliament implemented a formal 10-year process of reconciliation. The aim of the process was to reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous people by the end of 2000. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was established to promote the process. The process had three broad goals: improving education, addressing Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage and developing a document of reconciliation. This 10-year process achieved several successful outcomes, including the "People's Movement" and the "Walks for Reconciliation". The outcomes were predominately linked to the broad education goal and occurred due to the involvement of the Australian community in the reconciliation process.

In this paper, I explore two inter-related programmes developed by CAR – community consultations and encouraging community involvement – that encouraged the involvement of the Australian community in reconciliation and were significantly responsible for the success obtained by the education goal. However, I also argue there were two issues involving many non-Indigenous people – their ignorance of reconciliation and Indigenous issues and their nationalist understandings of reconciliation – that ensured that overall the goals, despite some successful outcomes, were not fully achieved by the conclusion of the formal reconciliation process.

### ■ Introduction

In 1991, the Australian Commonwealth Parliament unanimously passed the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act, 1991* that implemented a formal 10-year process designed to reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The process concluded at the end of 2000, in time for the Centenary of Federation celebrations in 2001. The *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act, 1991* created the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) to assist in the reconciliation process. The process had several broad goals: educate the wider Australian community about reconciliation and Indigenous issues; foster a national commitment to address Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage; and investigate the desirability of developing a document of reconciliation, and if considered desirable, advise on the content of a document (CAR, 1991, pp. 3-4).

By the conclusion of the 10-year reconciliation process in 2000, neither the aim nor the three goals of reconciliation had been fully achieved (Gunstone, 2005). However, despite this, there were a number of successful outcomes for the formal reconciliation process. Some examples include an increased awareness of Indigenous issues amongst non-Indigenous people, the Sydney Harbour Bridge Walk and the creation of a "People's Movement" for reconciliation. These successful outcomes were largely linked to the broad education goal and resulted from the involvement of the Australian community in the reconciliation process. CAR conducted two inter-related programmes that were designed to involve the Australian community in the reconciliation process – community consultations and encouraging community involvement. I analyse these two programmes and argue that they greatly contributed to the successful outcomes achieved by the reconciliation process concerning the education goal.

I also analyse the understandings of reconciliation and Indigenous issues amongst the wider Australian community over the formal 10-year reconciliation process. This analysis illustrates two particular issues concerning the wider non-Indigenous community. First, their knowledge of both reconciliation and Indigenous issues remained very poor throughout the process. Second, their knowledge of reconciliation and Indigenous issues was heavily influenced by nationalist

understandings of the reconciliation process. This strongly suggests that despite the success of some CAR programmes, such as the "People's Movement", the broad goal of educating the wider community about reconciliation and Indigenous issues was not fully achieved by the conclusion of the formal process at the end of 2000.

There are three sections in this paper. In the first section, I briefly discuss the impact of nationalism upon the formal reconciliation process and the education goal. In the next two sections I analyse two CAR programmes – community consultations and community involvement – that successfully involved many Australians in the reconciliation process.

### ■ Education and nationalism

In 1994, CAR developed eight key issues for its work on reconciliation. These key issues were:

- Understanding country.
- Improving relationships.
- Valuing cultures.
- Sharing histories.
- Addressing disadvantage.
- Responding to custody levels.
- Agreement on a document.
- Controlling destinies (CAR, 1994, pp. 17-18).

The key issues are all situated in the three broad goals of reconciliation that I argue were the primary goals of the formal reconciliation process. The first four of CAR's key issues – understanding country, improving relationships, valuing cultures and sharing histories – all formed part of the broad goal of educating the wider Australian community about reconciliation and Indigenous issues. The next two key issues – addressing disadvantage and responding to custody levels – were part of the broad goal of addressing Indigenous socio-economic indicators. The seventh key issue – agreeing on a document – fell within the broad goal of investigating the desirability of developing a document of reconciliation. The last key issue – controlling destinies – was addressed by all three broad goals (CAR, 1994, pp. 182-184).

One of the key issues relevant to the broad education goal was "Sharing histories: A sense for all Australians of a shared ownership of their history". Norman (2002) argued that in addressing this key issue, some non-Indigenous supporters of reconciliation "borrowed" aspects of Indigenous identity, culture and history. There have been several rationales stated for this "borrowing" or appropriation of Indigenous identities, cultures and histories by non-Indigenous reconciliation supporters. These include "Christian, Jungian and New Age perspectives", which argued that "Aboriginal cultural property will enable non-Aboriginal Australians to heal the alienated self,

become reconciled with the land that they inhabit, regain a lost mythopoeic realm and acquire a hitherto lacking spiritual continuity" (Rolls, 1998, pp. 171, 184; see also Gale, 2001, p. 129; Norman, 2002, p. 13).

There are numerous examples of this appropriation, including the assertion by non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs that they had rights to country due to their knowing some rudimentary Indigenous knowledge; the claim by a non-Indigenous author that his being born in Australia enabled him to access a "Dreaming story" in the Kimberley; and the view of John Williamson, a country singer, that he felt like a "white Aborigine" (Rolls, 1998, pp. 171-172). Ronald Wilson, the Deputy Chairperson of CAR from 1991 to 1994, stated that non-Indigenous Australians had "pride in indigenous art, music and writing which now forms part of our culture" (Wilson, 1994). Academic and author Germaine Greer (2003, pp. 15-16) argued:

Aboriginality is not a matter of blood or genes ... it follows that whitefellas can achieve a measure of Aboriginality ... if we think of Aboriginality as a nationality, it suddenly becomes easier ... acquiring Aboriginality is to a large extent the getting of knowledge.

Several Indigenous academics have criticised this non-Indigenous appropriation in areas such as art, place names and literature (see Birch, 2003, pp. 149-150, 154; Kurtzer, 2003, p. 188; Langton, 2003a, p. 86). Further, they argued that non-Indigenous people selectively appropriate those aspects of Indigenous identity, culture and history that are non-confronting to their understandings of Australian identity, culture and history. Thus, Langton (2003a, p. 87) argued that non-Indigenous people often favour Indigenous art that they can label as "authentically primitive" and is not "too self-conscious, maybe too political, worse still, 'part-Aboriginal', or a domain in which cultures clash" (see also Onus, 2003, pp. 95-96; Perkins, 2003, pp. 99-101). Similarly, Kurtzer (2003, p. 187) criticised the significant level of interest by non-Indigenous people in "non-threatening" Indigenous literature such as Sally Morgan's *My place* (1987) (see also Huggins, 2003, p. 65; Langton, 2003b, pp. 116-117).

This nationalist approach by many non-Indigenous reconciliation supporters to appropriate non-confronting aspects of Indigenous peoples' identity, culture and history aimed to strengthen the non-Indigenous connection with Australia. This approach also would, if successful, blur the distinction between "Indigenous" and "non-Indigenous", thus restricting any challenges to existing power relationships (Moran, 1998, p. 109). Further, this appropriation of Indigenous identities, cultures and histories by non-Indigenous people hampers any attempt to achieve substantive and genuine reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in which non-nationalist

issues such as sovereignty, institutional racism, self-determination and treaties are addressed.

This emphasis on nationalism by many non-Indigenous reconciliation supporters was significantly influenced by several factors that have occurred since the 1960s. These factors have impacted on the wider Australian communities' sense of identity and history concerning Indigenous and non-Indigenous race relations in Australia. These factors include the writings of revisionist Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians, such as Jackie Huggins, Henry Reynolds, Ruby Langford and Bain Attwood; the public success of Indigenous activism, such as the 1965 Freedom Ride and the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy; international changes, such as the United States civil rights movement, the South African anti-apartheid campaigns and the decolonisation of many African and Asian countries; the shift from racial nationalism to civic nationalism following the World War II; the gradual erosion of emotional links with Britain; and the changing ethnic makeup of Australian society (see McKenna, 1998, p. 70; Moran, 1998, p. 105).

All these factors have contributed to many non-Indigenous people viewing the history of Australia differently, experiencing feelings of guilt and shame and questioning the legitimacy of the Australian nation (see Attwood, 2000, p. 255; Manne, 2001, p. 104). Further, Mulgan (1998, pp. 184-185) argued that, although the "moralising liberals" embrace this guilt as a "badge of honour and a source of self-esteem", the majority of non-Indigenous people feel uneasy about the emotion of guilt.

Many non-Indigenous people who feel guilty or ashamed about the past see the reconciliation process as a means to assist them to feel more secure about both themselves and their country (Pratt et al., 2000). Accordingly, there was a significant emphasis on nationalism throughout the formal Australian reconciliation process from 1991 to 2000. By adhering to this nationalist framework, many non-Indigenous people aimed to remove much of the guilt, concern and uncertainty that they felt regarding the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in Australia. Further, a range of non-nationalist issues, including sovereignty, institutional racism, self-determination and treaties, were marginalised or ignored by many non-Indigenous supporters of the reconciliation process as these issues challenged their limited understandings of "sharing history".

### ■ Community consultations

CAR conducted numerous consultations with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities, with all levels of Australian government and with specific industry sectors. CAR saw these consultations as important in guiding their work on reconciliation (CAR, 2000, p. 18). In this paper, I focus

on CAR's consultations with the wider Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and two particular methods used by CAR to facilitate this process: public consultations at meetings and conferences facilitated by CAR, and the social research commissioned by CAR.

### *Public consultations*

In its first term (1991-1994), CAR initially consulted primarily with Indigenous communities through engaging 13 Indigenous organisations throughout Australia to act as community consultation agents. These agents coordinated meetings, disseminated information, received feedback about the reconciliation process and reported this feedback to CAR. In December 1993, the wider Australian community was also brought into CAR's consultation process with the launch of CAR's Australians for Reconciliation programme. Coordinators for this programme were appointed in all states and territories to "seek views and foster partnerships between the wider community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities" (CAR, 2000, p. 62). The programme's aim of encouraging Australians to become involved in the reconciliation process is discussed in the following section. The coordinators also disseminated information about reconciliation and Indigenous issues, including leaflets, brochures, videos, promotional materials and study guides. In 1995, these two consultative mechanisms – the community consultation agents and the Australians for Reconciliation programme – were combined into one Australians for Reconciliation programme that saw both Indigenous and non-Indigenous coordinators employed in all state and territory programmes.

Throughout the 10-year formal reconciliation process, this programme was extremely useful in enabling the wider Australian community to provide feedback to CAR concerning Indigenous issues and reconciliation. However, a limitation of this programme was the emphasis on "working together", with Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples resolving issues together; the programme seemed to not recognise the possibility that some issues might need to be resolved separately.

During the life of CAR, there were three significant rounds of public consultations. The first round in 1994 involved CAR and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) holding 35 meetings with Indigenous communities and organisations to ascertain Indigenous views on what the Keating Federal Government should include in its proposed Social Justice Package. These consultations were comprehensive and "it is unlikely that as full and ambitious a national policy development process has ever taken place in any country, and certainly never under the control of indigenous peoples themselves" (Jull, 1996, p. 1). Following these consultations, CAR developed a submission to the government titled *Going forward: Social justice for the first Australians* (CAR,



1995a). It is interesting to note that this submission reported that some Indigenous people argued that they had not ceded their sovereign rights as Indigenous peoples (CAR, 1995a, p. 35). This position stands in stark contrast to the nationalist views of reconciliation held by many non-Indigenous people. These nationalist understandings of reconciliation (see below) marginalised many Indigenous views on issues such as sovereignty, self-determination and a treaty.

The second and third major rounds of consultations occurred prior to CAR's two most significant conferences, the 1997 Australian Reconciliation Convention and Corroboree 2000. The Australians for Reconciliation coordinators played an important role in these consultations, organising and facilitating hundreds of public meetings. The consultations of 1997 involved over 100 public meetings and 10,000 people throughout Australia and sought the views of the Australian community on three specific issues: "reconciliation in the community; human rights and Indigenous Australians; and documents of reconciliation and constitutional issues" (CAR, 2000, p. 27). These consultations highlighted the nationalist views towards reconciliation held by many in the wider community in listing a range of issues that respondents felt were important for a document for reconciliation. The issues listed did not include sovereignty, but instead included a statement that the document should "acknowledge past wrongs, end hostility and enable us to become 'one nation'" (CAR, 1997a, p. 20). Further, in discussing what could be done to advance reconciliation, respondents focused on the need for further education, with few mentions of issues such as racism and no mention of issues such as sovereignty recorded (CAR, 1997b, pp. 5-14).

The third significant round of consultations occurred in June 1999 after the release of CAR's (1999) *Draft document for reconciliation*. CAR sought the views of the Australian community on both the content of the draft document and of the most appropriate ways to give effect to that document. These consultations "represented one of the most far-reaching processes of public consultation ever conducted in Australia on a matter of social policy" (CAR, 2000, p. 26). Over 300 meetings were held throughout Australia and the feedback from these consultations included written feedback from 263 of these meetings, 200 separate public submissions and almost 3000 personal response forms. CAR also wrote to all local, state, territory and commonwealth governments and a wide range of sectoral groups as well as meeting with many of these organisations in an attempt to consult as widely as possible with the Australian community.

In addition to CAR's consultations, several key Indigenous leaders, including Pat Dodson, Geoff Clark and Gatjil Djerrkura, also were involved in discussions

concerning any document of reconciliation. These leaders argued that any document of reconciliation should be a formal agreement between Indigenous peoples and governments that specifically discussed issues such as Indigenous rights, a treaty, self-determination, customary law, land, power relationships, sovereignty and constitutional recognition (Clark, 2000, p. 233; Djerrkura, 1999, pp. 6-7; Dodson, 2000, pp. 269-273; see also Foley, 1999, pp. 29-31). These views differed sharply from the views of the wider Australian community on a document of reconciliation. As will be discussed below, social surveys revealed that many in the wider community opposed any non-nationalist reference in a document of reconciliation.

The results of CAR's extensive consultations saw the development of the final documents of reconciliation, which were released in May 2000 at Corroboree 2000. These final documents consisted of an "aspirational statement", the *Declaration towards reconciliation* and the *Roadmap for reconciliation*, which outlined four national strategies for reconciliation designed to "implement the principles of the Declaration" (CAR, 2000, pp. 71-74).

### *Social research*

In addition to these public consultations, CAR also conducted a number of social research surveys throughout its 10-year life. CAR (2000, p. 19) "regarded this social research as part of its consultation responsibility, informing it of the views of the Australian community as a whole". This information assisted CAR in the development of new education and public awareness programmes.

Initial social research surveys were conducted in 1991 and 1992 to establish a reference point on the Australian community's attitudes to reconciliation. The research, involving discussion groups and a national survey of 1200 respondents, illustrated that the Australian community had a poor or negligible knowledge of both reconciliation and many Indigenous issues (CAR, 2000, p. 31). Further, this research found that "the proportion of people saying they were in favour of Aboriginal reconciliation was 48%" (CAR, 2000, p. 82). The wider community's lack of understanding about reconciliation was highlighted by this initial research. The research illustrated "the need for Council to articulate what is meant by the reconciliation process" (CAR, 1994, p. 24).

This initial social research was extended by various follow-up surveys. In particular, there were two major social research surveys conducted by CAR in 1995-1996 and 1999-2000. CAR (2000, p. 19) stated that "these two studies are probably the two most extensive surveys ever conducted of community attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues related to reconciliation".

The first survey in 1995–1996 consisted of both quantitative and qualitative research. All the participants were non-Indigenous and it involved 43 focus groups and a telephone survey of 1250 people. This survey showed some positive results for CAR's education programme, including an increase in awareness of the reconciliation process from 28% in 1991 to 51% in 1996, and a rise in the level of support for reconciliation to 83% (Johnson, 1996, p. 4). However, the report indicated some concerns in regard to the overall goal of education. For example, although the report demonstrated an increased awareness of reconciliation since 1991, it also showed that this was attained in 1993 and had reached a plateau shortly thereafter (Sweeney, 1996, p. ii). The sharp increase in awareness in 1993 could have been influenced more by publicity surrounding the 1992 Mabo decision – and the links made by Paul Keating and others between reconciliation and Mabo – than by education programmes. Further, the figure of 51% awareness of reconciliation in 1996, half-way through the formal reconciliation process, highlighted the difficulties faced by CAR to widely educate the Australian people about reconciliation. Moreover, whilst the level of support for reconciliation was measured at 83%, the comparisons with previous results were acknowledged to be problematic due to the differing mode of questioning between this study and previous studies (Sweeney, 1996, p. 11).

Although this 1995–1996 survey concentrated on attitudes, it also asked several questions to gauge awareness of factual events. The respondent's lack of knowledge of Indigenous issues was highlighted by their responses to these questions. Only a third of respondents knew that Australia was the only former British colony to not negotiate a treaty with the Indigenous people and approximately half of those interviewed were not aware that Indigenous people were only counted in the Census following the 1967 Referendum (Sweeney, 1996, p. 26). Overall, the report acknowledged this ignorance of reconciliation and Indigenous issues, along with the closely related concerns of fear and apathy, were the main barriers to reconciliation (Johnson, 1996, pp. 4-5).

The report also illustrated the ignorant and nationalist views of many of the non-Indigenous respondents. It found that the respondents, when asked what reconciliation meant, had difficulty articulating a clear definition (Sweeney, 1996, p. 1). Further, they often answered with nationalist responses such as “co-existence, harmony, unity (not perpetuating ‘them and us’), acceptance, sharing (of both cultures) ... [and] consultation (between all parties)” (Johnson, 1996, p. 3). These nationalist viewpoints were also illustrated in the respondent's comments concerning a possible document of reconciliation. Finally, in regard to issues of social justice, the respondents seemed to define justice primarily in terms of improving socio-

economic conditions with most identifying Indigenous disadvantage in relation to employment and health rather than in relation to land rights (Sweeney, 1996, p. 7).

The second of these two major surveys initiated by CAR was conducted in 1999–2000. This comprised three components. The first was a qualitative survey conducted by Saulwick and Muller from December 1999 to January 2000. It involved 14 focus groups and 23 in-depth interviews and investigated respondent's attitudes to both the reconciliation process and to CAR's (1999) *Draft document for reconciliation*. The nationalist views of the respondents to this survey were acknowledged in the survey report when it stated that the respondents had a “willingness to treat Aboriginal Australians like any other Australians provided they are prepared to accept ‘our’ values and play by ‘our’ rules ... they have accepted the concept of multiculturalism – one nation, one people” (Saulwick & Muller, 2000, p. 5). Further, the report highlighted the general ignorance of respondents about the concept of reconciliation. Many respondents saw reconciliation as an Indigenous issue, often confused reconciliation with other issues such as Mabo and land rights and were mostly unaware of CAR (Saulwick & Muller, 2000, pp. 5-6). The survey report also found that respondents saw the draft document “as divisive, backward-looking, based only on the Aboriginal perspective ... and a high-risk document which would probably be used as the basis for claims for land and monetary compensation” (Newspoll et al., 2000, p. 37).

The second component was a national quantitative Newspoll survey commissioned by CAR in early 2000. This survey also investigated Australian's attitudes to Indigenous people, reconciliation and the *Draft document for reconciliation* (CAR, 1999). It had two stages, telephone interviews with 1300 Australians and follow-up telephone interviews, with a subset of 280 people from the initial sample, to investigate their views on the draft document that had been mailed to them. Respondents from the first stage of the survey, who had not read the draft document, almost universally stated that all Australians should have equal rights and opportunities (Newspoll, 2000, p. 8). Respondents from the second stage demonstrated similar nationalist views. Although 74% responded more positively than negatively towards the document (Newspoll, 2000, p. 12), there were particular sections of the draft document that were disliked more than others. The most liked sections “were those that focussed ‘on unity, sharing or equality’” (Newspoll et al., 2000, p. 35). Those phrases most disliked were “apology” (44% against); “acknowledgement of original owners” (39%); “colonised without consent” (40%); “stop the injustice” (30%); and “customary laws” (32%) (CAR, 2000, p. 33).

The final component was conducted by Saulwick and Muller in March and April 2000. It investigated

the views of Indigenous people concerning both the reconciliation process and the draft declaration. CAR acknowledged that this was the first survey where Indigenous views on reconciliation were isolated as a specific survey group (CAR, 2000, p. 19). This survey demonstrated the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people's attitudes towards the concept of equality. While surveys addressed to the wider Australian community found much opposition to the "special treatment" of Indigenous people and a preference for a simplistic view of equality that everyone should be treated the same, Indigenous respondents stated the necessity for "special treatment" if they were to attain equality (Saulwick & Muller, 2000, p. 11). The survey results also identified elements of the draft declaration of particular importance to Indigenous people: the apology, acknowledgement of Indigenous people being the original owners, recognition of customary law and acknowledgement that Australia was "colonised without the consent" of Indigenous people (Saulwick & Muller, 2000, p. 11). These particular elements were precisely the same ones that the 2000 Newspoll survey, which surveyed the wider community (discussed above), reported were the most disliked amongst its respondents.

#### ■ Encouraging community involvement

Another programme that CAR implemented in an attempt to address the goal of educating the wider Australian community was encouraging the community to become involved with reconciliation. There were three significant developments in the history of this programme: the establishment of the programme in CAR's first term via the implementation of the Australians for Reconciliation programme; the "Call to the Nation" that occurred during the 1997 Australian Reconciliation Convention which called for wider community involvement in reconciliation; and the consequences of this call, which saw the growth of the "People's Movement" in CAR's final term (1998–2000).

During its first term, in December 1993, CAR launched its Australians for Reconciliation programme. One of the aims of this programme was to consult with the wider community about issues of reconciliation (discussed above). The second aim of the programme was to encourage the involvement, at the local level, of the wider community in reconciliation projects. CAR believed that the involvement of the wider community in developing reconciliation projects in their own local communities would help educate them about the concept of reconciliation (CAR, 1994, pp. 241–245). Fitzduff (1999, p. 98) and Gastrow (1999, pp. 108–109) argued that civil society involvement is vital in these types of peace-building processes. Phillips (2001, p. 171) also recognised the importance of community involvement, arguing that "because of its essential societal dimension, reconciliation cannot be imposed

or legislated by the more powerful party". It was envisaged by CAR that these projects would be joint projects between Indigenous people and the wider community (CAR, 1994, p. 19). To facilitate these joint projects, the Australians for Reconciliation programme, under the theme of "Working Together", worked closely with CAR-appointed Indigenous Community Consultation Agents. In 1995, the community agents were amalgamated into the programme, which increased the potential for developing joint projects involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The Australians for Reconciliation "Walking Together" programme facilitated and encouraged a diverse range of local community reconciliation projects. Participants in the Learning Circles programme were encouraged to become involved in reconciliation activities (Australian Association of Adult and Community Education, 1993, p. 10). CAR publications, including annual reports, triennium reports and the *Walking together* magazine, often reported on these reconciliation projects. For example, the triennium report for CAR's first term described projects occurring throughout Australia in an attempt to inspire readers to develop their own local reconciliation projects (CAR, 1994, pp. 19, 192–245). A special publication of CAR was produced, *Together we can't lose*, which detailed a number of examples of "Australians working together to make their communities better, breaking the barriers between them" (CAR, 1995b, p. 2). The triennium report for CAR's second term did not provide specific examples of community projects, but did acknowledge that the programme was one of the most significant achievements of the second term (CAR, 1997a, p. 8). In the report CAR stated that "the AFR network is alive with activities including public meetings and guest speakers, awareness programs in schools and other institutions, support for newly-established reconciliation groups and study circles, and discussions at many levels" (CAR, 1997a, p. 8).

The number of reconciliation projects reported by CAR publications suggested that there were many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people striving to improve relationships in their communities. These projects provided a solid foundation for the advent of the "People's Movement" that followed the 1997 Reconciliation Convention. However, the types of projects mentioned in CAR's publications indicated that many of the community projects were situated in a nationalist framework. The projects emphasised the importance of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and communities cooperating and working together, but mostly did not discuss any issues of racism, self-determination or sovereignty. Further, the projects concentrated on the first two goals of reconciliation, education and improving socio-economic conditions, over the third goal of developing a document of reconciliation.

In May 1997, the Australian Reconciliation Convention was held in Melbourne. Prior to the Convention, CAR (1997c) distributed a booklet, *The path to reconciliation: Issues for a people's movement*. This aimed to promote awareness and community involvement in both reconciliation and the upcoming convention. The booklet highlighted the issues that CAR had targeted to be addressed at the pre-convention meetings and the convention itself (CAR, 1997c, p. 3).

Also prior to the convention, over 100 local community meetings were held throughout Australia, involving more than 10,000 people, to discuss the reconciliation process and to articulate suggestions for CAR on various options for local reconciliation projects (CAR, 1997b, p. 2). A range of possible options were discussed, and despite many of these being worthwhile projects, such as writing local Indigenous histories, staging cultural festivals and developing cultural awareness courses, very few of the options recorded mentioned issues of racism and none mentioned issues such as sovereignty (CAR, 1997a, pp. 5-12).

The convention was held from 26-28 May 1997 and involved over 1800 participants. One of the major themes was to investigate the involvement of local communities in reconciliation (CAR, 1997b, p. 15). This theme was addressed in the first of the convention's four sessions. This session consisted of a plenary session, featuring six speakers, and a series of 12 concurrent seminars. In the plenary session, whilst the four non-Indigenous speakers did not clearly define reconciliation and often spoke in nationalist language, the two Indigenous speakers, Marcia Langton and Mandawuy Yunupingu, both articulated a deeper understanding of the concept of reconciliation (CAR, 1997d, pp. 18-25). The 12 seminars focused on various sectors of Australian society, and explored the broad theme of reconciliation in the community as it related to each specific sector. The seminars covered industry, local government, youth, the arts, sport, women, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, media, faith groups, policing and custodial issues, schools and education and society. They consisted of speeches from panel members and then guided discussions with the convention's participants. The participants also considered, and were able to accept or reject, a number of propositions developed by CAR, which related to their seminar (CAR, 1997b, pp. 22-23). During these seminars, the participants hardly raised any issues that fell outside a nationalist view of the reconciliation process. In all the propositions accepted by the 12 seminars, only one mentioned racism and none mentioned self-determination or sovereignty (CAR, 1997b, pp. 29-90).

The convention also highlighted the theme of local community involvement in reconciliation by having an awards night on 27 May 1997 to recognise the numerous reconciliation projects that had occurred throughout the Australian community. Awards were presented in five categories: community, culture/

land, government, business/industry and youth. The aims of the awards night were to both acknowledge and reward successful reconciliation projects and to provide models for further reconciliation projects (CAR, 1997e, p. 2). CAR (1997e) produced a booklet, *Ideas for action: Proceedings of the Australian Reconciliation Convention*, which detailed 60 of these projects. These projects demonstrated some very successful partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and communities. All were developed as responses to local community issues and most involved local people (CAR, 1997e, p. 5). The projects demonstrated the importance of partnerships, trust, symbolism, friendships and education in improving relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. However, these projects concentrated predominately on these issues. There was only one mention of racism and self-determination and no mention of sovereignty in the summaries of each project (CAR, 1997e, pp. 7-75).

During the closing ceremony of the Australian Reconciliation Convention, the Chairperson of CAR, Patrick Dodson, included a "Call to the Nation" in his speech. This call stated that reconciliation could only be achieved through a "People's Movement" for reconciliation, "which obtains the commitment of Australians in all their diversity to make reconciliation a living reality in their communities, workplaces, institutions, organisations and in all expressions of our common citizenship" (CAR, 1997a, p. 10). Dodson acknowledged that the convention had demonstrated that there was an enormous commitment from many Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to work for reconciliation. He called on his "fellow Australians" to also join this "People's Movement" in order to substantially achieve reconciliation by the 2001 Centenary of Federation (CAR, 1997a, p. 10). This "Call to the Nation" was endorsed by the acclamation of the 1500 convention participants. It was a statement of hope and pride in the possibilities of the "People's Movement" and the involvement of the wider community in reconciliation activities.

The Australian Reconciliation Convention and, in particular, the "Call to the Nation", provided a significant boost to CAR's programme of encouraging involvement of the wider community in reconciliation (CAR, 2000, p. 60). CAR worked closely with State Reconciliation Committees, established in 1996, and the Australians for Reconciliation Coordinators, in facilitating this growth in the "People's Movement". The increase in involvement was visible soon after the Convention, with CAR (1997a, p. 38) reporting the formation of 96 new reconciliation groups to the end of October 1997. These groups were established in a wide range of settings including communities, workplaces, churches, schools and local government. They were mainly concerned with improving local relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous



people. The number of these groups continued to increase over the last term of CAR. Nettheim (2000, p. 63) observed in 2000 that "today, there are State and Territory Reconciliation Committees and hundreds of reconciliation groups operating at a community level throughout the country".

This community involvement in reconciliation was often linked to other Indigenous issues such as the Stolen Generations or Native Title and was organised by a variety of groups. Events commemorating the Stolen Generations, such as National Sorry Day, an annual event started on 26 May 1998, the signing of "Sorry Books", and the "Journey of Healing", attracted significant support from the Australian community (CAR, 2000, p. 64; Nossal, 2000, p. 299). The Howard Government's 1997 10-point plan that aimed to significantly amend the *Native Title Act, 1993* saw the establishment of a lobby group, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR). The purpose of this group was to work with the Indigenous lobbyists, the National Indigenous Working Group on Native Title, to educate the wider community about Native Title and reconciliation and to lobby against the Howard Government's 10-point plan. ANTaR raised awareness of reconciliation and Native Title through meetings, promotional materials and media events such as the "Sea of Hands", where thousands of different coloured cardboard hands, labelled with names of supporters of reconciliation, were planted in various prominent locations around Australia, including near the Sydney Opera House and Uluru.

These national campaigns, that linked reconciliation with issues such as Native Title and the Stolen Generations, could have further confused many people about the actual meaning of reconciliation. This was especially significant given that most publications and awareness-raising activities on reconciliation did not actually articulate a specific definition for reconciliation. Both CAR and opinion pollsters argued that this confusion over both the issues of Native Title and reconciliation and the actual meanings of reconciliation could lead to a drop in community understanding and support for reconciliation (CAR, 1994, p. 24; Saulwick & Muller, 2000, pp. 5-6).

The strength of the "People's Movement" was demonstrated at Corroboree 2000 which was held at the Sydney Opera House from 27-28 May 2000 to mark the release of CAR's *Declaration towards reconciliation* and *Roadmap for reconciliation*. Following the formal proceedings of the first day, the second day of Corroboree 2000 featured a symbolic walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge. In addition to a quarter of a million people participating in this walk, many other walks, involving hundreds of thousands of Australians, were also held on the same day and throughout the year in capital cities and country towns across Australia (CAR, 2000, pp. 60, 68). The

extraordinarily large number of people involved in these marches demonstrated that there was a significant level of support in the Australian community for reconciliation (CAR, 2000, p. 83).

However, whilst the bridge walks demonstrated that many Australians had a significant awareness and support for reconciliation, they did not necessarily illustrate that the wider community had been educated about reconciliation and Indigenous issues. Many people who marched for reconciliation in the 2000 Sydney Harbour Bridge walk actually held nationalist views of reconciliation. These participants stated that they were marching so that:

'Australia could be one again' ... 'now we can all be equal' [and] ... 'I am not a believer that they need a treaty or a sorry - what I believe would be a better way to go is to just be part of what we are. I don't consider Aborigines to be them I consider them to be us' (Special Broadcasting Service, 2000; Pratt et al., 2001, pp. 143-144).

Further, the lack of understanding amongst the participants regarding the actual meaning of reconciliation was illustrated by the numerous messages conveyed by the marchers. The participants carried banners, flags, badges, t-shirts and placards stating a broad range of political views. Pratt et al. (2001, pp. 143-144) argued:

Though a quarter of a million people 'walked for reconciliation' by crossing the bridge, there was no singular or prevailing meaning of what this reconciliation, that was being walked for, actually was. There were multiple understandings ... there was no clear consensus on what the bridge walk was about or on what it was designed to achieve, beyond a collection of good will gestures gathered under the banner of reconciliation.

## ■ Conclusion

By the end of 2000, the formal Australian reconciliation process had not succeeded in fully achieving their three broad goals of improving education, addressing Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage and developing a document of reconciliation. However, several achievements had occurred, predominately in the area of education. These achievements occurred as a result of CAR implementing two interrelated programmes - community consultations and encouraging community involvement - that ensured the wider Australian community was very involved in the 10-year reconciliation process. This involvement was somewhat unusual when compared with international examples of national

reconciliation projects. For instance, Tutu (1999, p. 184) argued that a significant failing of South Africa's reconciliation project was its inability to attract support for the project from the majority of the white community.

However, as I have argued in this paper, despite the successful outcomes, including the "Peoples' Movement", the increased knowledge of Indigenous issues amongst some non-Indigenous people and the Walks for Reconciliation in 2000, there were two issues, concerning the overall non-Indigenous population, that impacted upon the overall success of the education goal. These issues were the poor knowledge of reconciliation and Indigenous issues and the nationalist emphasis on the reconciliation process. The impact of these two issues ultimately ensured that the broad goal of improving education did not succeed.

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