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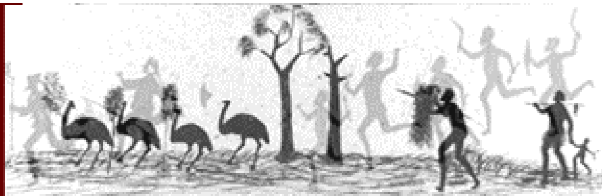

RECONCILIATION AND ITS HISTIOGRAPHY: SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS

Dipesh Chakrabarty

History is being debated globally in quite interesting ways at the moment. Old questions of the very nature of history continue, as well as newer ones about whether everybody should have the same kind of history. I see 'Aboriginal History' (which I am using within quotes, in other words, I am using the name as it is used in Universities for teaching courses in 'Aboriginal History') as a newer development which has not yet been linked up with global changes. I use the term, but I am also questioning the degree to which it can properly be called 'Aboriginal History'. When I started reading in the field several things were at stake for me. One was a personal stake. I am a 'new' Australian, who now teaches in the United States, but I lived here continuously for twenty years and so there is a part of me that wants to participate in the political events in this society. That's the personal part. The intellectual part is that I had been working towards a series of problems to do with democracy, to do with what has happened to the idea of the political in the world, and what has happened as a consequence to democracy. I have a sense that democracies have been changing in interesting ways over the last thirty years, since the nineteen sixties. I am thinking mainly of Western democracies, but I would have to include the Indian. So in that context I've been thinking about the democratisation of historiography, how the democratic changes in these Western democracies have been impacting on the writing of history.

As is well known, one of the first democratic revolutions to happen in the writing of history in the post-war period was so-called attempt to write 'history from below'. This is associated with E. P. Thompson's and Eric Hobsbawn's work, starting in late fifties. But in the sixties it gathered momentum. The Thompson-Hobsbawn revolution was an undisputed global historiographical revolution in the democratisation of history. It did not threaten historians, everybody thought that this was a good way to go. If you look at histories in different places, in Latin America, South-East Asia, India, they are all influenced by what Hobsbawn, Thompson, and Christopher Hill wrote. This tended to happen within each national historiography, as history writing traditions are nationally bounded; a lot of creative energy in history writing was thus galvanised. My own involvement was in India with the Subaltern Studies group, which was inspired by the Hobsbawn-Thompson premises, but differed from them as well.

For Australia, it seems now to have been in 'Aboriginal History' that a lot of interesting and dynamic work has been done. Historians of Aboriginal-European relations have often echoed the assumptions that marked the historiographic revolution initiated by Thompson, Hobsbawm and others. The result has been a sea-change in portrayals of Aboriginal cultures in academic writing. Let me give just one example of this change. One of the things I read while working on this question was the Masters thesis of Bob Tonkinson, a respectedanthropologist from the University Western Australia, who has been active in land rights and the Aboriginal cause. His Master's thesis was done in 1966 under the supervision of the famous anthropologists, Ron and Catherine Berndt.[1] The thesis was no doubt approved by Dr Tonkinson’s supervisors, but it was quite amazing to read it in our current historical moment: it had the word 'acculturation' in the title. It was about how Aborigines would acculturate, the word itself a piece of American sociologese of the fifties. The idea was that Western society would ultimately act as a melting pot. It would eventually produce one culture and the people who were not of the West but had found themselves in Western capitalist and democratic countries would have to assimilate. It may seem strange today to read the concluding remarks of Dr Tonkinson’s thesis. The ‘ethnocentrism’ of the Aborigines, the young Dr Tonkinson wrote then with some conviction, was a barrier to change. How times change! Within seven

years from the time when Dr Tonkinson completed his thesis, as policy thinking and popular thinking emerged from that assimilationist era, the same evidence 'cultural stubbornness' would come be seen as evidence of cultural survival.

My suggestion for this workshop is that we open a dialogue between post-colonial histories and indigenous histories in Australia. Henry Reynolds is the pre-eminent historian in the field of Aboriginal history, and I want to start with an argument of his, articulated in *Frontier*, which I feel does not address the non-British post-war immigrant. There is a way in which 'someone like me', an immigrant who has lived for many years in Australia, and now in the US (a position which perhaps gives me another perspective) feels left out of the debate. Reynolds' argument about `reconciliation' is in terms of a black-white war of conquest and hence the need for a treaty with the conquered.[2] The `immigrants' are not the conquerors, they came into an Australia already wrested from the Aboriginal by the white settlers. The immigrants thus get locked out of his argument. At the end of *The Other Side of the Frontier* [3] he puts forward the proposition that if (white) Australia does not reconcile with the blacks, then they, the blacks, - heaven forbid - may take their inspiration from third-word nationalism and from the likes of Frantz Fanon! Reynolds does not actually mention Fanon. He only uses Fanon's phrase 'the wretched of the earth.' But having grown up on a postcolonial diet of Fanon and Indian nationalism, I found Reynold's concern unfamiliar though I understood what he was perhaps trying to achieve with his statement.

I was encouraged, however, to find Mudrooroo, in Us Mob[4], articulating a position closer to that of postcolonial analysis: 'To survive, we had to become educated in the conqueror's ways, and when we became educated we found others in the same predicament as ourselves. And so some of us read Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and Trin T. Minh-Ha.' So while Reynolds has undoubtedly been one of the most effective historians documenting and arguing a powerful case for black-white reconciliation, Mudrooroo's statement has the advantage of widening the net of solidarity. What can a postcolonial Indian/Australian historian based in the United States say of Aboriginal history? Where are the meeting grounds?

Mudrooroo's statement hints at the shared predicament of the colonised or the once-colonised in that they have to speak in the master's voice in order to survive and be heard. The master-discourse in question here is the discipline of history. Howsoever different Aboriginal and Indian traditions may have been with respect of narrations and enactments of the past, we both need to be able to translate them back into the discipline of history. That seems to be one of the requirements of participation and presence in modern constructions of public life. We therefore need to know what history, the master code, is. But we do not simply master the master's code; we change it, hybridise it, breathe plurality and diversity into it. Sometimes, the pressures of such diversity brings the code into some kind of a crisis. So what does `Aboriginal history' do to our ideas about what history is?

The answer is clearly stated by Mudrooroo. He says, history, the discipline, has become 'fragmented'.[5] Why? Because a diversity of narratives and enactments about the past - myths, stories, memories, archival records, songs, dances, legends and so on - now all compete for the label 'history' and produce 'post-modernist' debates about whether or not, or in what sense, 'historical facts' exist. Many leading Australian historians, Reynolds and Graeme Davison for example, welcome the explosion of interest in the past that now marks public life in this country and elsewhere.[6] Reynolds in particular

feels that this burgeoning and popular interest in the past, if anything, vindicates the role of the academic historian. It is because there are public disputations about what exactly happened in the past - for example, questions such as 'did the Europeans in Australia always see this country as terra nullius?' Or, `was Aboriginal ownership of land recognised in early European discussions in Australia?' - that historians have a larger role to play. Indeed, the role that Reynolds' own researches played in the Mabo case demonstrates his point. Reynolds therefore, in a talk given in 2000 at the National Library in Canberra, expressed plain puzzlement that some of his colleagues in History departments should be assailed by 'epistemological doubts' and 'move around in circles' while public debates, according to Reynolds, validated 'old fashioned' ideas about 'historical facts' and archival research.[7] This point, in a different context, is made by Hobsbawm as well in his essays in *On History*.[8] Postmodern historians, Hobsbawm says, may dispute the very idea of `fact' but the administration of justice in a court of law privileges the traditional idea of `evidence' that historians normally use.

What is often lost sight of in these debates is the point that it is precisely because the past is enjoying such a boom in public life in all the democracies of the world, that 'epistemological doubts' arise. The past now figures in broadly two kinds of contexts. The first is where disputations occur over the 'facts' of the past. It is here - though not always, it has to be said - that the 'old fashioned' historian's skills in ferreting out 'facts' from dusty, archival records may come in handy for the oppressed. Reynolds' own work is a superb example of how intelligent, committed, and politically canny historical narratives can further the cause of social justice, and we are all in his debt for what he has achieved. Yet, even here, the methods of the historian do not always favour of the oppressed. As Diane Bell points out in her book on the Hindmarsh Island bridge case in South Australia, the 'invention of tradition' argument - a favourite of historians without any 'epistemological doubts' - can result in a 'denial of justice' to Aboriginal groups fighting mining companies.[9] Diane Bell, Stephen Muecke, Deborah Bird Rose, Peter Read and a host of other historians have argued, creatively and persuasively, for an expansion of our idea of what may be regarded as a 'historical fact' and for us to give credence to 'experience' and its 'truths' that may not always be verifiable by the historian's methods.[10]

But even if we granted Reynolds his point in cases where the factual nature of the past was what was in question, there is still another context in which the past becomes a debated point in modern post-sixties democracies. And this is the context of the so-called 'identity politics.' There are many instances, for example, in which we find previously oppressed, marginalised and silenced groups (re)claiming their pasts in an effort to feel good about their identities or even to secure identities they were once denied by the dominant groups. There are many examples of this. I think of the debate on 'Afrocentrism' in the US and in particular around Martin Bernal's book, *Black Athena*..[11] But think, nearer home, of the 'stolen generation,' urban Aboriginal groups, and of the children of immigrants searching for 'roots.' Here the struggle is often about acquiring an identity, not one of defending an identity that one already has a 'naturally given.' The past one creates in the process of acquiring an identity and feeling pride in it is necessarily diverse and mixes, one might say, histories with memories. It is also what gives rise to 'relativist' talk about historical facts, divergent perspectives, multiple narratives.

An interesting consequence of this democratising of the writing of history in the 1970s was that the way historians became interested in the study of memories and

experiences of people who did not produce written documents of their own. And out of this emerged came the seventies' experiments in oral history. If you go back and read, for instance, Anne McGrath's book *Born in the Cattle*,[12] I hope you will be as impressed as I was with the self-consciousness with which Dr. McGrath used oral sources. The epilogue to the book discusses the advantages and disadvantages of oral history and how it produces data fundamentally different to what one may find in the archives.

Oral history is predicated on the privileging of the category of experience. It's only much later that Joan Scott, the feminist historian eventually wrote a very interesting article critiquing this idea of experience and the historians' privileging of it.[13] Since then there have been responses from other cultural studies theorists explicitly or implicitly disagreeing with Scott and arguing why experience was still a very valid category.[14] But that's taking the story to the late eighties and nineties. The reason why oral history didn't initially threaten historians was, firstly, that it was justified democratically by saying that since the archives are mostly from the ruling classes, literate people and the police, the ruling class point of view resides in the archives. So if you want to get at other people's point of view you have to go and talk to them. And sometimes what people say in oral history and what you find in the archives are remarkably different and interesting for that reason. And secondly, it was thought that oral histories would allow us to supplement the story from the archives, so if there are gaps in the archives, oral evidence would help fill them. As supplementary knowledge, oral history, it was thought, couldn't pose any great threat to the discipline. There had been an older tradition of a vigorous debate about using oral history among Africanists. Jan Vansina's Africa-centred book on how to use oral traditions (along with an interest in Anthropology) came back into mainstream historiographical debate in the West because of the West's discovery of oral history in the seventies. Vansina's concern was to sift historical facts from legends and myths. But oral history – which represented a moment of democratisation in the writing of history – in fact acted like the Trojan horse in historiography through which the soldiers of Memoryland eventually came. For, as Ann McGrath observed in the seventies, in doing oral history one could never completely separate the past from the present. Besides, as we know now, memory is not just about remembering, it is also about forgetting and sometimes about not even wanting to remember. Some telling instances of the latter were recorded in India recently when some feminist scholars began to do research on the history of the partition of the country between India and Pakistan. Some of them found that several of the women on the Hindu and the Muslim sides who were abducted forcibly and raped during the violence of the Partition had in fact married their abductors and become mothers and grandmothers. When sought for interviews, these women refused to talk about or remember their experience.[15] The researchers thus discovered that oral history innately produces certain no-go areas for research, and that is where the terrain of memory is different from history. The historian who works with written, archival sources is commended for filling gaps in our knowledge. The historian's search for sources is motivated by a desire to `exhaust' them. Memory, however, is constitutively woven around gaps. There is sometimes no question of filling them. Far from being simply complementary to each other, memory and history tell of very different relationships to the past that we can or do possess.

The professional discipline of history positions the historian as a citizen-subject contributing to a public debate about what happened in the past. The premise of this public debate, as you would know from Habermas' book on the public sphere, is the principle of equal access to information. Public Record Offices embody this principle. When one does oral history, however, the question of equal and unrestricted access to

information is immediately put under question by what people actually do. E.H. Carr's book *What is History?* , which is a series of lectures given in the 60's, says that what makes a piece of information historical or into a historical source is that it is essentially verifiable.[16] Verifiability of historical evidence requires such evidence to be `public'. I can't tell you that someone wrote something in a particular document and then not make the document available to others. That is why the archives are set up as institutions to which all bonafide researchers have access.

The historian cannot treat evidence produced by oral history in the same way as he or she may treat evidence in the archives. The archival evidence is there for the historian even before the historian gets there. The historian himself or herself, on the other hand, has a role in the production of the evidence of oral history. As I was saying, what historians have increasingly discovered through oral history is the realm of memory. History and memory are related but they are not the same. Pierre Nora's in his *Realms of Memory* presents the proposition that history, the objectified past, only comes into being in societies in which memory has died.[17] I could illustrate that with a personal example from my early days of teaching in Melbourne University history department. One day I saw an Australianist colleague going off to his first year class of Australian history with videos of the TV series The Dismissal (1975). Even though I came to this country after '75, the events surrounding Whitlam's dismissal were still very fresh in my memory. So I said to my colleague, 'You mean that's history, it's only 1975?' This conversation took place in the late 1980s, some twelve-thirteen years after 1975. My colleague replied by saying that the young freshmen hardly know anything about the Whitlam period, it was in fact his duty to tell them. This was amazing for me, because it made me think of a soccer match that was played in Calcutta in 1911, long before I was born, of course! I knew the details of it because my father told me the whole story. This was the first match in which an Indian team--a Bengali team--actually defeated a British military team. The British military team wore proper soccer boots and we played bare-foot, so that only added to the glory of this match. I knew who played. The stopper in defence became known as the Chinese Wall in Calcutta because the Brits couldn't get past him. I had always assumed, prior to the conversation with my Australianist colleague making me think about it, that my father had actually watched this match. Then I thought about it and realised that he was only one year old when the match was played! So for me, that match of 1911, was not history because it was part of my family stories. It was vivid in my memory; it was part of memory rather than history. For it to become history, as Nora was said, the memory had to die. Maybe Western societies are increasingly societies in which memories die faster than history, or memories die and produce histories.

We have become increasingly aware, I think, since the eighties and nineties of the difference between history and memory. Democratic history-writing still calls on us to listen to the voice of `experience' but `experience' as a category speaks more to memory than to the discipline of history. The more we attend to experience in our historiography the more history gets entangled with memory. I see it happening in 'Aboriginal History'. It is not just the impact of oral history on 'Aboriginal History' here, but the whole boom in publication of life stories and documentation of life stories. In privileging the experience of Aboriginal people, I see a continuation of this democratisation of history writing.

Some historians feel uncomfortable with all this talk focusing on the difference between memory and history. They raise Hobsbawm's kind of objections: that in order to adjudicate disputations about what happened in history, we need to agree on what 'facts'

are. These historians feel that we cannot afford to say, 'you have your facts and I have mine.' They have a point, yet it seems to me that they are operating within an understanding of 'the politics of identity' in democracies which only partially describes where democracies are at now, especially since the sixties. Built into the position of historians such as Hobsbawm or Reynolds is an invitation to 'transcend' one's given, particular identity in favour of a general one (such as the nation or class). Thus, in Reynolds' model of reconciliation, the Aboriginal and European/White identities are given, and both parties have to transcend the pulls of their respective identitarian affiliations in order to agree on the facts of an injustice committed in the past. They meet as equal citizens of some future Australia. The same stance was once built into the propositions of liberalism and Marxism: one was born to certain particular identities, one struggled to acquire general or universal identities of a class, of the citizen of a nation, or even of the human. This position, I might say again, is not so much invalid as it is partial in its capacity to describe the politics of identity in contemporary democracies. It assumed that democracy was about development - of the individual into the figure of the rights-bearing citizen, of the nation into a harmonious unity, of the class into an entity-for-itself.

But what has changed interestingly in democracy is that this particular way of looking at identity is no longer the only one dominant in the political scene. The political position recommending that we transcend the particularistic identities we are born to has been supplemented by another kind of movement where people actually struggle to acquire and value identities that are indeed particularistic. One of the most moving moments in Ruby Langford Ginibi's *book Haunted by the Past*, about her son Nobby, is when Nobby comes out of jail to a crisis point in his life.[18] What she does is to go travelling with him into the countryside. She goes to particular sites, you know, 'here is our old tribal ground, there is a story, and I'll tell you this story'. Nobby is learning the story as an adult, and he says 'Mum you should teach me these things'. At that point he acquires and performs an identity, which in the narrative has a healing function. It gives him pride in what he is. The politics of identity which involves acquiring and performing them, is, of course, not liked by people who subscribe to the other position. They think the politics of identity is tying you down to parochialism, to particular ties. And it is not helping you to achieve that super-universal or general identity. Now that position is not invalid, it is still here with us. What I'm saying is whether one likes it or not, one interesting characteristic of post sixties positions is that identity itself, like welfare, like the dole, has become a good to be acquired, and one has a right to it: an identity which is specific rather than general. If you think of the older model, where you have an identity that you are born to and as you grow you struggle to transcend it, it is like a subjective version of the narrative of democracy tied to the notion of development, an old idea going back to John Stuart Mills' essay on representative government. His argument was that in order to be a citizen, a political person, even a socialist person, you need to go through some sort of training; an idea of development. I'm opposing to that the idea that democracies are now are as tied to the idea of diversity as they are to the idea of development. Diversity is not a developmental paradigm.

Ideas of development, propounded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, are still relevant and popular, some more than others. In fact, if they were not so, we would not be able to explain the public appeal of Reynolds' position on reconciliation: that Australia can develop into a united nation if blacks and whites come together to acknowledge a shared history. Since the late sixties, however, there have been some very major changes in Western democracies that have created a context for both

reconciliation-talk as well as the talk about multiculturalism. We now understand democracy to be not just about development but also about diversity. (Laclau and Mouffe, among others, theorise this.[19] In the politics of diversity, identities are not so much given and then transcended in the interest of an overarching unity; they are acquired and performed in contexts in which unities are seen as always contingent and shifting.

This post-sixties politics of diversity in democracies has something to do with decolonisation of the world after the war and the consequent opening up of the former white settler-colonies for emigration of skilled and skilled labour from the formerly colonised nations. For the current politics of diversity is premised on insistent questions about representations and power (who can speak for whom?). They also entail a gesture of rejection of the European colonial powers' capacity to deploy historicist reasoning in order to be able to say to the colonised that they, the latter, were 'not yet' prepared for self-rule and self-representation and that some amount of historical time of development had to elapse before they could be readied for sovereignty. As I have sought to explain in my book, *Provincializing Europe*, anti-colonial nationalisms since the First World War have pitted against this European gesture of the 'not yet' the temporal horizon of the 'now.'[20] Anti-colonial movements have opposed the idea that the colonised needed time to 'develop' into political subjects and instead argued that the colonised - and the human generally - were always already, and everywhere, political. Feminism of the seventies contributed to this gesture by arguing that the personal was political, that nothing was beyond the ambit of the political. The impact of this idea may be seen in Aboriginal histories written from the nineteen seventies onward. Stephen Muecke, Anne McGrath, Heather Goodall, Bain Attwood, Peter Read, Deborah Bird Rose - all write from the assumption that the Aboriginal constitute a political subject at any point of time in history. Reynolds himself explicitly states this in *The Fate of a Free People*.[21] If one remembers the way anthropologists for generations - up until the early sixties -- saw the Aboriginals as 'people without politics' (see the chapter with that title in Les Hiatt's *Arguments About Aborigines*), the change in the later use of the word 'political' becomes obvious.[22]

My point is that the global wave of decolonisation movements after the Great War -- and the new social movements of the sixties -- had something to do with this politics of diversity in the Western democracies. Which is why both the talk about reconciliation and the multicultural talk begin about the same time, the late sixties to the early seventies. They are both signs of democratisation of the larger Australian society. We now live in an Australia in which the Aboriginal, the descendant of the European settler, and the post-war immigrant are all present. Reconciliation -- the acknowledgment of the special rights and situations of the First People -- has to involve us all. It is not something that happens simply between the blacks and the whites. How would history-writing reflect this multi-lateral involvement? More to my own interest, how would it promote a conversation between the Aboriginal and the post-colonial immigrant? The present absence of this conversation has been noted by many including Ann Curthoys and Paula Hamilton.

Here my thoughts are furthered by the differences in the approaches of Reynolds and Mudrooroo. Reynolds and many other white liberal historians emphasise the history that blacks and whites have shared in the making of this country. Tom Griffiths' *Hunters and Collectors* is a wonderful book. But as I began to read it I stumbled on this sentence where Griffiths says of early European `historians and scientists, collectors and naturalists' in Australia that they `were feeling their way towards the realisation that

becoming Australian would, in some senses, mean becoming Aboriginal.'[23] It is a sentence written with good intention and empathy for historical subjects. Yet it gave me pause. What would it mean to live in an Australia where we could self-consciously enter the process of `becoming Aboriginal'? What is desirable and what might undesirable in the process? To me it seems that such a self-conscious process for the non-Aboriginal person can only begin if the writing of Aboriginal history by Aboriginal intellectuals achieves so much sovereignty in Australian public life that it is possible for Aboriginal intellectuals to dispute their own pasts in public. They would then be able to guide us in thinking about what one may not want to inherit from the legacies of Aboriginal presence in this land. Let me illustrate from my own experience what I mean by this. In my own life, I have acquired - or shared with the white person - a broadly Western identity. Thanks to the long history of British rule in India, the process began for me before I left India, perhaps in my childhood, with schooling. The process was reinforced when I came to Australia. Of course I imbibed much of what I saw, I interiorised a whole lot of identity material. But do I like everything I have come to share with the European from his or her pasts? Didn't becoming Western also not teach me things that I self-consciously might not have ever desired? New ways of hurting people, for instance. India gave me one set of techniques for being cruel, for hurting people, for insulting them. I then learnt other ways. From the English one can learn very polite ways of insulting people. When we Indians insult people, it's direct and raw; you see that I'm insulting you. But when an Englishman insults you, he can choose to insult you in such a way that you feel the insult only five minutes after it's been uttered. It's an art-form. There's enjoyment in it -- but I guess I don't particularly like everything that I have come to share with the white people. But my critical attitude is only made possible by the fact that many European or white Australian intellectuals are themselves critical of many of their own practices. To acquire an identity does not mean that you like everything about it. So, while the idea of developing a sense of shared history between the Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals appeals to me, I would like to know something about what I may not like about `becoming Aboriginal'. But this I cannot do unless and until Aboriginal intellectuals find the conditions of Australian public life congenial enough to allow themselves to debate their own pasts in public, to discuss with complete ease in Australian public life aspects of their pasts they may want to reject. But this they have to do without feeling that by doing so they were once again simply falling prey to white prejudices. Were such discussions ever to take place, Aboriginal history would become genuinely diverse and plural, we would have to call it `Aboriginal histories'. I do not believe that we have reached that condition yet in Australian public life. I like the idea of shared histories and yet I think it's damn difficult to share histories in ways that also allows us to negotiate differences. And we should not make a difficult thing seem easy. 'Aboriginal history' becoming 'Aboriginal histories' will depend on our collectively getting to a point where identities (including diverse Aboriginal identities) don't dissolve into each other and the past is something one can dispute without causing anxieties about the unity of the nation.

Besides, we have to connect the talk of reconciliation to the talk about multiculturalism. The way forward, it seems to me, is precisely through Frantz Fanon (if I could use him as an icon of postcolonial criticism) and his discussion of how race perverts the logic of capitalism. Remember how in his *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon made a point about the Manichean logic of race making the straightforward narrative of transition to capitalism untenable in the colony?[24] Reynolds' narrative of settler-Aboriginal relations would have benefited from an engagement with Fanon. Reynolds squarely bases his argument for reconciliation on the idea of invasion and wars of resistance. The European

settler invaded the Aboriginal's country, conquered the latter, and yet did not sign a treaty. The settlement therefore as of now has no legal basis. The descendants of the settler therefore should conclude a treaty with the descendants of the original owners of the country. Reconciliation, in effect, is between blacks and whites in this argument and the immigrant can simply take a seat on the side and watch the show. In finding Fanon's anti-colonial analyses irrelevant and in subscribing - via Hobsbawm's *The Age of Revolution* - to the theory that the dispossession of the Aboriginal was simply yet another case of capitalism displacing earlier modes of production just as it had happened in Europe, Reynolds' analysis, while very powerful for what it explains and what achieves politically, cannot explain - as Heather Goodall does - why the usual capitalist story of redemption did not apply to the Aboriginals. In the standard European story of transition to capitalism the displaced peasant or serf eventually enters the 'free' labour market of capitalism and can set himself/herself up as middle-class or join the ranks of petty commodity producers. Why did not the Aboriginal benefit in the same way from capitalist development in Australia? Heather Goodall's masterful study shows - confirming what Fanon said writing out of colonial Algeria - that White racism thwarted all Aboriginal attempts at capitalist enterprise in spite of there being ample proof of their having made good farmers and labourers in the settler-colony.[25] A powerful conclusion one might draw is that Aborigines have had no problem comprehending the logic of capitalism. In other words, they were not – in the language of Eric Hobsbawm – people with a `pre-political' consciousness on whose lives capitalism impinged but whose consciousness was never adequate to the task of understanding capitalism. Heather Goodall documents a Fanovian reality: it was the Manichaean logic of the settler's racism that interrupted any Aboriginal transition to capitalism.

If we base the argument about reconciliation on the idea of invasion and conquest, we go down Reynolds' path of historical narration. It is, as Reynolds' work shows, a productive way to go but it locks us back into a black-white binary and keeps the immigrant out of the debate. Mudrooroo, on the other hand, looks at Aboriginal history through the idea of colonialism. Aboriginal knowledges, life-worlds and life-practices were not only invaded, they were colonised as well. In other words, he allows for what the postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak has called 'epistemic violence.' He therefore legitimately draws our attention to the predicament that the postcolonial theorist shares with the Aboriginal theorist. He thus creates the possibility of a conversation between the Aboriginal historian of today and the immigrant-historian. It is not based necessarily on 'shared histories' (as may be claimed between the Settler and Native) but on the shared predicament of having been colonised (both politically and intellectually). I am not, however, advocating Mudrooroo over Reynolds. Aboriginal history can be seen through both paradigms: the conquest paradigm and the colonisation paradigm. The paradigms yield different results, both useful to Aboriginal and other contemporary struggles, but while the conquest-paradigm leaves the immigrant out in the cold, the colonisation-paradigm draws her into the dialogue. Either way, the point is to acknowledge the special rights of the First Peoples of this country.

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Notes

[1] Robert Tonkinson, `Social structure and acculturalion of Aborigines in the Western Desert', Thesis (M.A.), (University of Western Australia, 1966).
[2] Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996).
[3] Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier : Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia* , (Ringwood, Vic : Penguin, 1990).
[4] Mudrooroo, *Us Mob: History, Culture, Struggle: An Introduction to Indigenous Australia*, (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1995).
[5] Us Mob, p. 177.
[6] Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000.
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Dipesh Chakrabarty is Professor of South Asian Studies and History at the University of Chicago where he is also a member of the Committee for History of Culture.