

Duplicity and Deceit: Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations

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Do you think the apology that Kevin Rudd issued will affect the way we as historians teach and write about Australian history?

Yes because its one of those events that is very easily stitched into the national mythology, especially the national mythology regarding Indigenous stuff in Australian history. We're in the process of seeing a revision of the Indigenous history of the last 50 years, and it's partly developed into an attempt to justify the intervention. To arbitrarily dismiss successful stories of Aboriginal agency and self-determination in the 1970s is important to those who require indigenous people to be regarded as victims in order to justify a draconian, imposed intervention. Thus we have a revision of recent history in which the enormous gains of the 1970s and 80s are diminished, dismissed and stitched into a fake tapestry of history as presented by the SBS television show, *First Australians*. This process of political cleansing and sanitisation will ultimately no doubt position Rudd's apology as one of its significant moments, even though the apology was not in fact for all Aboriginal people. People should remember that the apology was only to that segment of the indigenous community known as the 'Stolen Generations'.

The emotional response to Rudd's apology which was evident everywhere in Australia, well in South Eastern Australia, makes it inevitable that this as an event will be a part of future white Australian mythology about how wonderfully they have always treated the Aboriginal people. It will become part of white Australia's long history of denial.

So you think it is going to go towards underwriting?

Well underpinning future mythologies about this period of Australian history where one day when Australians ultimately do have to account for their past treatment of Indigenous people they will be looking to the High Court Mabo decision, the Rudd apology, events such as that contribute to the myth that Australians did care about Aboriginal people, Indigenous people and Indigenous affairs. Whereas the truth is, or seems to be, the opposite, as we live through this era anyway.

How do you think the Australian apology sits internationally with the current climate of apologies, like Canada's apology?

All nations in the modern world have built into their agreements with each other to establish their diplomatic relations, the key condition which says that no country shall interfere with the internal affairs of another nation. And so most countries in the

international political arena have, whilst being fully aware of Australia's transgression when it comes to human rights for Indigenous people in Australia, been very reluctant to get involved or take a stand. So that gives them the perfect out. So they look to things such as Rudd's apology as a means of appeasing their own conscience, for not having raised their voices about human rights abuses in Australia. So it will serve the interest of other nations very well. It gives them a further out and a further excuse for not having expressed concern, so it's all part of the whole international Machiavellian game that nations play.

As a historian what do you think it means for one group of people to apologise to another?

The only thing that apologies do as far as I can see, is at the very least, it's admitting a wrong doing. Which gives minimal comfort to the wronged. Unless it's accompanied by some sort of meaningful form of compensation or reparations for past wrongs that have been committed, then it is a farce.

When I heard and went back and reread the apology I think that the language that was used was interesting. For instance how he was apologising on behalf of 'Australians' to Indigenous people. It's sort of a way of further excluding and marginalising...

You're right about how the language is cunningly constructed. If you examine it closely, it is in fact not an apology to the Aboriginal people of Australia. It is an apology to the Stolen Generations. One single group within the broader Aboriginal community. And a group which some might argue has not been as hard done by as those who weren't stolen.

What about those who had to live through the apartheid years, those who had to live through repressive administrations and protection boards and people. But the key point is that it's not an apology to all Aboriginal people at all, and yet that's what most Australians have perceived it as being.

What do you think the apology means to blackfellas in general?

Given the duplicitous wording it means nothing at all. It is completely devoid of meaning. Some people have clearly responded emotionally to what they perceive is the intent, but their perceptions of the intent and the actual wording of the apology are two completely different things.

Could he have done it differently?

He could have been a lot more honest and taken the opportunity to make it an apology to ALL the indigenous people of Australia, accompanied by some offer of a compensation based reconciliation. A meaningful offer in terms of reparation and compensation, for all lands alienated. Or at the very least a truth and reconciliation commission similar to that created in South Africa at the end of Apartheid. Whereby a nation is forced to face up to the truth of its past, rather than just gloss over and dismiss it all in a single speech.

How do you think its sits within the history of relations between white Australia and Black Australia?

It is yet another fraud in the long line of historically fraudulent acts and dishonest gestures that typify the indigenous experience of all governments in Australian history. It's part of a long history of deception, duplicity, deceit...

What are some of the things you are thinking of when you refer to that?

Well, how about terra nullius, genocidal policies euphemistically named 'assimilation' or 'intervention', denialism and the history 'wars', the farce of native title....is that a start?

So you are saying that you think it is going to do more harm than good?

I would say that it already has.

How so?

It has deceived people. It's a deception.

The fact that most people actually think it was an apology to Aboriginal people is in itself a deception. It means that the Australian people have been conned into thinking that some sort of significant gesture has been made to aboriginal people. It hasn't. In the same way they were deluded into thinking that the Native Title Act delivered land justice to indigenous Australians, which 15 years down the track we now know it didn't.

How do you think the apology meets the demands of the history of Indigenous struggle for the recognition of Indigenous rights?

It is yet another example of the double dealing that Aboriginal people have had to contend with from the government since the beginning.

A lot of Aboriginal people fought for the apology though...

Well I wouldn't necessarily say that that is true. There is no doubt that the staunchest advocates for the apology were the Stolen Generations, but the Stolen Generations are not the Aboriginal people. I mean, I don't begrudge the Stolen Generations their apology but it should be seen for what it is. An apology to the Stolen Generations is NOT an apology to ALL Aboriginal people.

And that is the key and probably most significant factor of the lot. And the fact that it is successfully sold by spin doctors and public relations merchants as an apology to the Aboriginal people and the fact that the majority of Australians perceive it as that is in itself a dangerous delusion.

Why is it dangerous?

Because it enables the Australian people to pat themselves on the back and delude themselves into thinking that they've done something significant for the Aboriginal people, which in fact they haven't. They've subjected us to an intervention which is a complete step backwards from Indigenous self determination. The federal intervention in the Northern Territory is just one part of a bigger, broader attack which had been mounted by those, both Black and white, who believe that assimilation is the way. This is a rebirth of the assimilation project.

Do you think there is a direct historical link between what is happening in the Northern Territory and the period of assimilation?

The period of assimilation was about government control of Aboriginal people. A social engineering experiment that was designed to result in assimilation. What's going on in the Northern Territory at the moment is exactly that.

So where do you think Aboriginal activism should be placing its energy?

Better educating themselves to think outside of the square. Not to be conned into false understandings of our own histories by people with other agendas. To seek and find our own truths about our own histories, beginning with their own family histories. To realise their own great-grandparents struggle for existence is a more important narrative than any of the superficial, sanitised and wrong interpretations of indigenous history that one was presented with in the amateurish and historically inaccurate SBS series The First Australians. People should know that blackfellas can make distorted propaganda as well.

We should clearly understand that there are some Indigenous 'leaders' who have their own agenda to push, and what they say reflects more about what their agenda is today than what it does about the actual history of the Aboriginal struggle.

How do you think these events of the past will continue to impact on future demands?

History is always present. The past is always present. The past is always with us. We are all defined by our past. Those who forget or deny that are destined to keep repeating the mistakes of history.

What do you think has happened to much core tenets of radical Indigenous activism? Like the calls for a Treaty, compensation etc

They haven't gone away. They are still where they always were.

The only difference is that the masters of mainstream media in Australia have found a new group of Aboriginal people who agree with their views of the world. And so it is these advocates who they will promote. And that is why you've got about three or four prominent Aboriginal people who seem to be the ones who are constantly on television and on the radio and in the papers purporting to represent the Aboriginal community. Thus, only their sides of their version of the story are reaching the public.

What do you think of the University of Melbourne's Apology?

It sits in the same vein as Rudd's apology. It is meaningless crap. Look at the way the university is slashing and cutting Indigenous subjects, and has lost most of its best indigenous lecturers. It makes a mockery of their apology. It is ridiculous to think that they support Indigenous people and Indigenous education, when they are doing things like that. It's simply further evidence of their duplicity, deceit and propaganda.

How do you think the apology should be taught at universities?

I think it should be taught in Political Science classes as an example of the duplicity and deceit of politicians. And it should be taught in psychology classes in terms of how a nation appeases itself of its guilt. And it should be taught in drama school as a classic example of Australian political comedy. And it should be taught in driving school as a magnificent example of defensive driving and evasive tactics and manoeuvres. It should also be taught in kindergartens as a fairly tale.

Should it be taught in history at all?

I don't see why. It will ultimately been seen to be of no real consequence at all historically.

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