
PETULANT AT HEART, BOLT'S ARGUMENT OBSCURES FACTS

Shireen Morris
May 13, 2016

Patriotism and hypocrisy don't override history.

In the past few years, Andrew Bolt has adopted a strategy of repeatedly claiming he is **indigenous** Australian in order to undermine arguments for **indigenous** constitutional recognition. He did so again on Wednesday night when I was on his show.

"I am **indigenous**, too," Bolt wrote in 2014. "I was born here, live here and have nowhere else to call home." His claim refers not just to him. In March, he wrote: "Anyone who is born here is indig-enous to this land, not least because- in most cases they have no other place to call home." The petulance in Bolt's argument is partly contrivance. But the argument is also deliberately obscurant of facts and complexities. Bolt muddles a legitimate emotional assertion with an illegitimate and incorrect factual assertion.

There are three important points to be made in response to Bolt's claim of indigeneity. First, as a matter of practical and legal reality, Bolt is not **indigenous** Australian. He is an Australian citizen of Dutch heritage - by his own account. Most people understand the difference between being an Australian citizen and being an Australian citizen of **indigenous** heritage.

Indigenous Australians are descendants of the people who were here before colonisation. The well-established three-part legal definition of indigeneity requires self-identification, **indigenous** descent and **indigenous** community acceptance. While Bolt disingenuously identifies as **indigenous**, he fails the other two requirements. He has no **indigenous** descent: his ancestors were not resident on this continent before British colonisation, they were resident in Europe. Given that fact, **indigenous** community acceptance of Bolt's claim is unlikely. Bolt could try to claim native title rights to Australian land on the basis that he is **indigenous**, but no one would recognise his claim as legitimate. That is because Bolt is not **indigenous** Australian.

Second, however, as a matter of emotional and spiritual connection to Australia, Bolt evidently speaks a patriotic truth that would resonate with many. Bolt's fondness for Australia as the only place he calls home expresses an important connection and loyalty to the land of his birth. It is a sentiment that I, as an Australian-born citizen of Indian heritage, also share. Australia- is Bolt's and my home as much as it is the home of Galarrwuy Yunupingu or Cathy Freeman.

To the extent that Bolt is asserting what conservative philosopher Roger Scruton calls "oikophilia", or love of home, Bolt's patriotism and attachment to his Australian national identity is legitimate and correct. Farming families living on and working the land for generations, the descendants of the Chinese gold-rush pioneers and those of Indian heritage born to migrant parents in urban Melbourne were all born

on this land. We are united by our shared citizenship, and we are all as Australian as each other.

Bolt evidently feels more allegiance to Australia than to The Netherlands, just as my home is more Australia than it could ever be India. Those sentiments are positive, inclusive, unifying. But Bolt's strange psychology with respect to indigenous people, as the descendants of pre-colonial people, is unbecoming and unnecessary.

The fact is, Bolt's oikophilia is completely compatible with indigenous recognition.

Bolt's love of home does not in any way cancel out the historical, political and legal fact there are Australians who are descended from the pre-colonial people of this continent.

Following Scruton, Noel Pearson has pointed out that as the bones of Bolt's descendants accumulate in the dust of this continent, his family's connection to this country will deepen and grow over generations. Pearson's point is about emotional and spiritual connection - Bolt is becoming more connected to this land.

However, the fact Bolt carries a generation or several generations of emotional and spiritual connection to this country, just as I do, does not negate the fact indigenous people carry a connection that is thousands of years old. Nor does it negate the fact there are Australians who do legitimately fall into the practical and legal category of indigenous Australians, and who may have rights and interests arising out of this status that do not apply to Bolt or me. That should be no cause for insecurity. In no way does this diminish our citizenship, our Australianness, or the fact this is our home as much as theirs.

Every colonised Western nation recognises and accommodates surviving indigenous rights within their legal and political systems. Australia is no different: that is why our law recognises native title.

The purpose of the law is to ensure that all citizens can enjoy appropriate rights in the circumstances, to ensure justice for all citizens. Recognising indigenous rights is part of ensuring justice for all citizens. That the law addresses the unique circumstances of indigenous Australians and their unique and ancient stake in this country should not cause Bolt to feel left out. It is simply a result of the historical and contemporary circumstances. It is just the reality.

Finally, the irony in Bolt's claim that he is indigenous cannot be ignored. In 2011, Bolt publicly criticised fair-skinned indigenous people, arguing that they were somehow not justified in choosing to identify as indigenous - that it was not legitimate for them to identify as indigenous only.

But in 2014, as part of his argument against indigenous recognition, Bolt himself saw fit to start asserting that he was indigenous, notwithstanding the fact he was fair-skinned, and notwithstanding the fact his ancestral heritage had its roots among the Dutch people of the continent of Europe - not the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of the continent of Australia.

Is there a better example of hypocrisy than a person who tells a vulnerable group that they should not identify as that group, only to then identify facetiously as part of that group himself? Is it not enough that the colonisers took **indigenous** land? Do the neo-colonise-rs seek to obliterate the **indigenous** identity as well?

Thankfully, Bolt's unpersuasive claim of indigeneity is no match for thousands of years of perseverance and survival.

Shireen Morris is a senior policy adviser at the Cape York Institute.