Reconciliation, Indigenous Peoples and Development in Australia: 'Closing the Gap' or Reimagining the Gap?

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In a 2013 speech to Parliament, Australian Prime Minister Gillard stated that "closing the gap *is* reconciliation" (Calma & Cilento, 2013). By this, Gillard was referring to more than a decade of policy and discourse in Australia oriented towards the achievement of 'reconciliation' between Indigenous peoples and settler Australians[1]. This focus on 'closing the gap' in the name of 'reconciliation' has produced numerous policy measures, two of which I focus on here—the Northern Territory Intervention measures and the Indigenous Governance Project. Both of these policy measures continue to operate within the Australian context, and they are both concerned with creating the conditions for development within Indigenous communities in remote Australia—an area plagued by significant socioeconomic disadvantages related to access to medical treatment, education, employment, and economic development which stem from conquest and colonization (Behrendt, 2001: 850; Mazel, 2009: 475; Sullivan, 2006).

I argue that both policies are working to entrench, rather than alter, colonial relations between Indigenous communities and the Australian state and society. It appears that the spirit of treaty talks which transpired in the late 1970s has all but been forgotten, and that a specific brand of reconciliation is being operationalized in the Australian context to justify the forward march of mainstream economic development within Indigenous communities and on Indigenous lands (Short, 2003: 506; Hart, Thompson & Stedman, 2008: 55; Sullivan, 2006). While it may have been slightly reconceptualised by the Indigenous Governance Project's framework, 'closing the gap' remains overwhelmingly focused on generating the conditions in which Indigenous peoples can sustainably 'catch up' to the rest of Australia, as opposed to generating those conditions in

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[1] Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous communities refers to individuals and groups with a history of life on the continent now referred to as Australia that dates back to before European settlement of the region (Dodson, 1994). Non-Indigenous or settler Australians refer to those people who came during the initial and later waves of settlement or immigration to the area. These groups are difficult to delineate. Life within the same geographical plane has meant that practical issues such as intermarriage and adoption, as well as different frameworks for defining and identifying Indigenous peoples coming both from within communities and from the Australian state have led to complicated and mutable categorizations (although this is not necessarily a bad thing).

which Indigenous and settler Australians alike can rethink their conceptions of 'development' in a manner that takes into account the understandings of Indigenous social, political and legal modes of organization and their rightful place in guiding Indigenous communities and their interactions with external actors (Sullivan, 2006). What is more, when this 'modernization' aim is not being operationalized by the state (as it was initially by the Northern Territory Intervention measures); it is being accomplished by transferring the responsibility for such an effort to Indigenous communities while maintaining the overarching authority of the state (as could be said of the Indigenous Governance Project, as well as those later incarnations of the Intervention measures).

In order to perform this analysis, I conceive of these policy measures—operating simultaneously within the Australian context—as part of a reconciliation approach which pits the achievement of 'development' by Indigenous communities at the heart of its logic. I do not attempt to answer whether or not such 'development,' however defined, would result in some sort of 'reconciliation.' I believe this answer largely depends upon what sort of development is being sought—if development, narrowly conceived, is even a desirable goal. While I cannot speak for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia, it does seem plausible that the reversal of conditions sustaining socioeconomic disadvantage—entrenched through land dispossession experienced during conquest and colonization—would be as good a step as any on a pathway towards 'reconciling' relationships between and within these two loosely constituted groups of peoples. However, what I am more interested in is the way in which the means to alter such disadvantage is being conceived. As such, I do not seek to address the normative debate as to whether or not 'closing the gap' could engender 'reconciliation,' but to chart how this 'gap' is

being understood, addressed, and—more broadly—what this means for Indigenous communities and the future direction of Indigenous-settler relations.

It is here that I take up the literature on development in the Global South[2], specifically the alternative and post-development schools of thought, in an attempt to better understand the ways in which development for Indigenous communities in Australia is being understood and rolled out; as well as the dangers and/or opportunities this poses for Indigenous communities. While this lens may seem ill-placed in the context of the Global North, I believe that it will help to illuminate the connection these policies have to broader goals often found within development interventions—that of modernization, liberalization, and progress—and to emphasize where the true locust of decision-making power exists within these policy frameworks. I hope this will serve to underscore my point that the policies produced by contemporary reconciliation efforts in Australia with the goal of 'closing the gap' have had more to do with bringing Indigenous peoples into the mainstream economic life of the nation rather than restructuring relationships so that Indigenous peoples' understandings of the world can be brought to the fore (see Short, 2003; de Costa, 2009)—even when they have emphasized the importance of Indigenous cultures to achieving successful (and sustainable) development[3] (see Sullivan, 2006).

I have chosen these two policies emerging from within the official reconciliation framework because despite the fact that they operate concurrently and stem from within a similar official discourse (of reconciliation), they present unique differences that are worth considering. In fact, within the range of policy measures conducted from within the state level discourse of

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[2] I use the term Global South to refer to those areas of the world thought to be 'underdeveloped' (see Frank, 1986). This can be contrasted with the Global North, or the Western world, which has had both a history of and (diverse) culture constructing itself as the advanced, or developed part of the world (see Said, 1979).

[3] The idea of sustainable development now prevalent in the international literature is seen to include three 'mutually reinforcing pillars'—economic development, social development, and environmental protection (Dodson & Smith, 2003: 5).

reconciliation focused on Indigenous development, these two examples are (in my mind) the most different—and thus apt for comparison. Through this analysis, I hope to demonstrate the range of possibility found within this policy arena, as well as the limits on this possibility which can serve to constrain what might be considered more desirable policy alternatives—and what is possible from within the state-level discourse on reconciliation in Australia.

I begin with an overview of the development frame used in this paper, and then provide a background on Indigenous-settler relations and the official reconciliation discourse in Australia. Next, I look at the two aforementioned policy measures in turn and assess them with the insight provided by post- and alternative development thought (as well as those scholars critical of these policy measures—including Mazel, de Costa, and Sullivan). Throughout this study, I focus on the manner in which each policy intervention conceives of 'development' and of how to achieve such an aim—how to close (or not close) 'the gap' between remote Indigenous communities and the rest of Australia. I conclude with my observations about the impacts of these policies upon Indigenous communities, as well as the future of Indigenous-settler relations in Australia.

The Development Lens

Development has been understood in various ways across time, cultures, schools of thought, and so forth. Within the literature, development was initially defined in economic terms (Scott, 1995). This was the case in 1960, when Rostow released a seminal work which came to be termed 'modernization theory.' Rostow (1960) argued that societies develop along a (five-stage) path that begins with 'tradition' and ends at 'modern' or 'developed.' The manner in which to achieve 'development,' defined here largely as an increase in the wealth and availability of material goods within society, was to implement specific measures aimed at creating the preconditions for 'take-off' (Rostow, 1960). These preconditions included the

influence of a more 'advanced' society, the introduction of new high-yield production techniques, a high degree of capital investment, the creation of a centralized nation-state, and so forth (Rostow, 1960: 6-8). More recently, the definition has been broadened to include a myriad of indicators related to 'quality of life,' and further still to encompass questions of morality (Ferguson, 1990). Specific to this case (and the Indigenous Governance approach in particular), sustainable development has come to be associated with finding an effective means of community governance[4] and thus with the development of these governance structures to oversee other forms of social and economic development (see Dodson & Smith, 2003).

This approach emerged largely in response to the perceived failures of previous development projects to generate the conditions for successful (economic) development (see Ferguson, 1990). As mainstream economic development projects repeatedly failed to effectively impart the conditions for 'take off' upon those areas of the Global South considered to be underdeveloped or developing, development scholars and practitioners went back to the drawing board and determined that the participation of those persons towards which development interventions were directed—such as in the form of community 'partnerships' and local decision making—were needed to engender successful and sustainable development (see Pieterse, 2000; Ferguson, 1990). This approach can properly be called alternative development (Pieterse, 2000). It comes from the recognition that many development projects are flawed at the outset, or based on the now certifiably false logic that certain cultures are 'backwards' and need to 'catch up' to the rest of the world; coupled with the acknowledgement that the development discourse need not be abandoned writ large based on these problems—for, some of the conditions maintaining poverty (or, 'underdevelopment') in certain areas of the world today can be linked to past and

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[4] Whereas self-government denotes jurisdictional powers of control over group members, lands, and resources; governance signifies the structures, processes and institutions required to be able to exercise this jurisdiction (Dodson & Smith, 2003: 2).

present actions taken by- as well as relationships to those rich (or 'developed') areas of the world (see Pieterse, 2000).[5]

From this perceived 'failure' of development, there also emerged another school of thought which sought to problematize the development 'problem' itself. The post-development school rejected the discourse and practice of development altogether, instead encouraging a search for initiatives that would constitute alternatives *to* development. A bulk of this post-development literature argues that a focus on partnerships and local-level decision making obscures the fact that these projects are still largely being driven by elites and by universal frameworks; and that, alternative or not, development projects on the whole have remained focused on generating a certain type of development that is steeped in a history of modernization theory and a constrained by a present of neoliberal economic thought which serves to delimit genuine alternatives (Pieterse, 2000).

While remaining cognisant of these warnings, I wish to modify the 'post'-development literature by balancing its powerful critique of the discourse and practice of development with an openness to the agency of those groups undertaking their own development projects and to the possibility that viable alternatives might *also* come from within (modifications to) the development discourse and praxis itself (although I do not necessarily place either policy measure assessed in this paper in this category) (Pieterse, 2000). In this respect, I wish to utilize the post-development school's "hermeneutics of suspicion and (…) suspicion of alternative development as an 'alternative managerialism'" without losing sight of alternative development thinking's ability to account for perspectives from the "bottom up," as well as the role of the

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[5] While the dependency theory school would not advocate for the continuation of development interventions (per se), this school of thought was among the first to highlight that the Global North, and the structurally entrenched relations between the Global South and North, are partly responsible and often serve to sustain much of the underdevelopment found within the Global South today (see Frank, 1986).

state (Pieterse, 2000: 188). This more balanced approach avoids the charge levelled at the post-development school by Pieterse (2000: 187), that—similar to neoliberalism—post-development "offers no politics besides the self-organising capacity of the poor, which actually lets the development responsibility of states and international institutions off the hook." This is especially important for Indigenous-settler relations in Australia, where the state does have certain responsibilities—stemming back to agreements made during initial contact and to contemporary attempts to redress the impacts of past colonial policies and re-establish a relationship of mutual respect—that should ideally be guiding its relationships with Indigenous peoples (see Short, 2003).

Similarly, I hope to avoid an argument which constructs Indigenous peoples and cultures as simply too different to survive any sort of interaction with those homogenizing forces of modernity and, thus, resigned to exist on the margins of mainstream society or, in the case of Indigenous peoples, faced with having to abandon their cultural understandings and identities in order to interact with others in a beneficial manner (Pieterse, 2000: 187). It is this sort of reasoning that leads to a rejection of development, and often modernity in its entirety, premised on the need to protect Indigenous cultures from its perceived steamrolling effect, and to the neglect of possibilities for reflexive development and "dialectics of modernity" (Pieterse, 2000: 187). I believe that there do exist viable alternatives *to* development, or even alternative modes of development that do not abandon the discourse altogether, which do not require Indigenous peoples to abandon their culture the second they seek to engage with external actors.

Thus, while I utilize insights from the post-development school, I do not share its conclusions in respect to the reject of the development discourse altogether—and my approach sits firmly in between the alternative- and post-development schools. In formulating this

approach, I take into account the insight provided by Ferguson (1990) in the South Africa context, who reminds us that while development interventions may start with specific goals determined by powerful actors, they often result in unexpected consequences, and these consequences often escape the control of those powerful actors whom sought 'development' in the first place.

Official Reconciliation Discourse in Australia

Returning to the Australian context, it is important to highlight that dispossession, colonization, and past government policies have created and perpetuated the conditions of socioeconomic inequality and systemic racism that exist today (Behrendt, 2001: 850). In 1993, Dodson (1994: 64-66) highlighted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were the only peoples in Australia living in poor health and housing conditions, who "held (a) unique status as peoples who continue to be 'legally' removed, without compensation from the lands we inherited from our ancestors," and who faced higher rates of infant mortality, child removal (into care), and incarceration. In light of these past and present colonial processes, many Indigenous peoples in Australia face significant socioeconomic disparities in relation to non-Indigenous Australians—which includes access to medical treatment, education, employment, and economic development (Behrendt, 2001: 850; Mazel, 2009: 475).

While Indigenous peoples in Australia have been actively resisting colonial impositions since first contact, the more recent land rights claims (considered by Australian courts) began in the 1970s, and the first official calls for a treaty were made at the 1979 National Aboriginal Conference (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 4). The official discourse on reconciliation in Australia did not emerge arbitrarily from the state either—it came into being through a contentious dialogue between Indigenous peoples, their leadership and the Australian

government.[6] In 1986, after facing criticism for failing to implement the national Aboriginal land rights legislation, Prime Minister Hawke of the Australian Labor Party first waded into the reconciliation pool (Brennan, 2004: 149). Indigenous groups then used the Australian bicentennial celebration two years later to highlight the legacies of colonialism, and Hawke responded with talk of establishing a treaty "between the Aboriginal people and the Government of Australia" (Brennan, 2004: 150). However, the government retreated from this position in 1991, when they instead came out with a discussion paper exploring the idea of a national reconciliation process (Brennan, 2004: 150).

In the final report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* in 1991 the call for reconciliation was made official: the Report tied the overrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples in the criminal justice system to the deliberate systematic disempowerment of Aboriginal people which began with the dispossession from their land and eventually came to encompass nearly every aspect of their lives (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 4; 13; de Costa, 2009: 5). As a response to this legacy, it called for a "systemic response to address disadvantage" (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 13). The release of this Report was immediately followed by the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991* which was passed unanimously by the House of Representatives and the Senate, thereby establishing the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 4).

This legislation, and the subsequent creation of CAR, was conducted with the recognition that there was a "need for dialogue between government and Indigenous leaders" (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 15). With a majority of Indigenous members, the development of CAR began with the implicit acknowledgement of the "currency of a treaty or "makarrata" in recent

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[6] Although, in comparison with other settler states (such as Canada), it did emerge into the state-level discourse in a slightly more proactive manner than one might suspect (see de Costa, 2009).

debates—specifically related to the 1979 National Aboriginal Conference in which Indigenous leaders called for such a treaty" (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 15). The Council operated for nine consecutive years, wrapping up its term in 2000, at which time its duties were handed over to the newly established Reconciliation Australia—an independent, not-for-profit national organization dedicated to "building and promoting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 5; 8; Brennan, 2004: 158).

Since the initial enthusiasm, talks of establishing a treaty have not been forthcoming within the official reconciliation process (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 38). More commonly, reconciliation has been aimed at addressing racism and discrimination, and has also made up the bulk of efforts aimed at engendering 'development' within remote Indigenous communities (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010). As Brennan (2004: 157) highlights, this was partly influenced by the Australian government's own preferences within the reconciliation debate: only recommendations related to addressing disadvantage and some tenuous support for "rights and recognition" have been operationalized, while issues such as constitutional reform (the most recent 2013 change notwithstanding), recognition of inherent rights, and structured processes for negotiating "unfinished business" have been pushed aside. Further, many Indigenous groups have viewed the national reconciliation process since its inception in the early 1990s with suspicion (Brennan, 2004: 150). Reconciliation has been described as "a pale imitation of the "real thing" (national land rights and a treaty)" and "viewed as a political soft option, which non-Indigenous Australians would find unthreatening precisely because it would do little to challenge their legal, political, and economic dominance" (Brennan, 2004: 150).

This appeared to be confirmed when, in the late 1990s, official reconciliation policy shifted from a rights-based agenda of self-determination[7] to a "near exclusive emphasis on service delivery" (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 12). The supposedly 'symbolic' reconciliation of the past was denigrated as ineffective, and the government of Prime Minister Howard advocated for 'practical reconciliation,' whereby measures were delivered through mainstream agencies and aimed solely at tackling the social and economic disparities experienced by Indigenous peoples (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 12; Brennan, 2004: 157). Reconciliation policy during this time shifted to a focus on "closing the gap" in social and economic outcomes to the point where Indigenous peoples "share the same standard of living as other Australians" (de Costa, 2009: 5; Brennan, 2004: 157). Policies sought to encourage the participation of Indigenous peoples in the mainstream economy, and framed traditional citizenship rights such as access to services within a reconciliation agenda (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 18). This decade was marked by a distinct "…lack of consultation with Indigenous peoples and a seeming lack of respect for distinct identities, cultures, and economies" (Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010: 18).

A significant part of reconciliation policy in Australia today remains directed at addressing Indigenous 'disadvantage' and, in particular, towards 'closing the gap.' A 2008 *Overview of the Economic Impact of Indigenous Disadvantage* conducted on behalf of Reconciliation Australia concluded that "there is a clear economic justification for government action to reduce Indigenous disadvantage" which would deliver benefits and increase the living standards of all Australians (Access Economics, 2008). In a 2013 statement to the House of

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[7] 'Self-determination' became an official policy approach of the Australian government in 1972. This approach has since been labelled 'self-management,' given that the content and results of so-called 'self-determination' policies had very little to do with a recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, and much more to do with the transfer of responsibility for their (colonially- and historically-) entrenched disadvantage to Indigenous peoples and away from the Australian state/society (see Mazel, 2009).

Representatives, Prime Minister Julia Gillard stated that reconciliation means a more united Australia, in which "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enjoy the same rights and opportunities as all other Australians" (Calma & Cilento, 2013). However, whereas the 1990s and early 2000s had been plagued by a lack of consultation with Indigenous communities, Gillard recognized that 'closing the gap' should be based on "a shared endeavour of partnership and respect" (Calma & Cilento, 2013).

Thus, for better or worse, reconciliation is now firmly part of the "mainstream Australian political vocabulary" which—despite its flaws—has created a relatively stable policy framework surrounding the rights agenda and the tackling of practical disadvantage in a manner that urges "the taking of responsibility not only by government, but also by the corporate sector, by local communities of citizens, and by all kinds of institutions within society" (Brennan, 2004: 159). The original campaign by Indigenous leaders and groups for a treaty—which gave birth to the reconciliation discourse in the first place—has become somewhat foreign to the reconciliation policies operating within Australia today (Short, 2003: 506). As a result, reconciliation policy is largely out of synch with the aspirations of many Indigenous groups (Short, 2003: 506).

The Northern Territory Intervention Measures

The Northern Territory Intervention measures were introduced in 2007 by the government of Prime Minister Howard, under whom the shift to 'practical reconciliation' occurred (de Costa, 2009: 6). These measures were drafted within a 48 hour period, during which the government declared a "national emergency" within Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory based on the findings of a report related to violence, addiction and child abuse in many of these areas (de Costa, 2009: 6). Ironically, these measures were portrayed as necessary to Indigenous-settler reconciliation—a response necessitated by the wide-spread failure of self-

determination and of Indigenous communities themselves 'to make a go of it alone' (Mazel, 2009; de Costa, 2009: 6). When the then Minister of Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, introduced the NT Intervention measures, he made the following statement:

> "When confronted with a failed society where basic standards of law and order and behaviour have broken down and where women and children are unsafe, how should we respond? (…) In an environment where there is no natural social order of production and distribution, grog (alcohol), pornography and gambling often fill the void…" (Mazel, 2009: 488).

During the initial phases of the Intervention, the Australian federal government bypassed the authority of the Territory government to exert its will over the region (de Costa, 2009: 6). The army was deployed, alcohol and pornography was banned, the state took control of welfare payments by linking income to things such as school attendance, new community managers were appointed, entire townships were acquired and forced to introduce new market-based rental and tenancy agreements, policing was increased, and it was declared that all children would be subject to medical examinations (de Costa, 2009: 6).

Shortly after this initial phase, a shift occurred within the content of the Howard government's practical reconciliation policies towards emphasizing 'mutual obligation' whereby Indigenous peoples were "charged with the responsibility to lift themselves out of their disadvantaged state" (Mazel, 2009: 485). Thus, while the Intervention measures have yet to be repealed by subsequent Australian governments, the 'Commonwealth has (also) begun to discharge its responsibilities for implementing the intervention by delegating program delivery to the Northern Territory Government and community-based organizations' (Altman in Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012: 55; Mazel, 2009: 496). The maintenance of the Intervention has involved a shift in its focus to "an integrated approach that values partnership and the activity, 'positive, willing participation' of the Indigenous community" in order to 'drive home the success of the intervention' (Mazel, 2009: 497).

Given insights from the post-development lens, it becomes apparent that the government's later attempts to shift responsibility for implementing the Intervention measures to Indigenous organizations and communities themselves does not constitute a real or genuine acknowledgement of local autonomy for Indigenous groups. Instead, this move signifies the divestment of the practical responsibilities to implement these measures to Indigenous communities, coupled with the persistence of efforts to incorporate Indigenous peoples into the economic mainstream via the Intervention measures themselves. As Altman (in Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012: 55) asserts, while the intervention was proclaimed to be about the sexual abuse of children, it very quickly became about "broader issues of social and economic dysfunction and (…) the "normalisation" and "mainstreaming" of Indigenous people." Similarly, both de Costa (2009) and Mazel (2009: 489) highlight that the negative caricatures of Indigenous culture(s) emphasized by the discourse surrounding the need for such measures served well alongside its broader neoliberal goals to encourage Indigenous peoples into mainstream economies—seen to be the solution to the poverty in Indigenous communities. We see this in the state's taking of control over welfare payments, as well as the introduction of market-based rental and tenancy agreements (de Costa, 2009).

Moreover, numerous scholars have characterized the Howard government's Northern Territory Intervention measures as a neo-colonial tool for regaining government control over the lives of Indigenous peoples through the façade of reconciliation (see de Costa, 2009; Mazel, 2009; Altman in Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012: 55). Mazel (2009: 487) conceives of these intervention measures as the continuation of the European 'civilizing mission.' This can be seen in Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough's speech constructing Indigenous communities as

existing without legal, social, and political organization—as anarchic and chaotic groupings of individuals who are in need of help from the benevolent settler state (Mazel, 2009).

In this sense, 'development' is being conceived through these measures in a conventional manner which harkens back to Rostow's (1960) modernization theory. In fact, this appears to be a relatively straight forward development intervention a la the modernization theory approach which seeks a movement from a state of 'backwardness' to a state of 'advancement' or 'progress' (see Rostow, 1960; Pieterse, 2000). There is minimal support for local or grass-roots decision-making (the divestment of practical responsibility for the measures notwithstanding); and development is conceived not just as a need to push Indigenous peoples into mainstream economies, but also as a need to remove any semblance of *difference* stemming from within Indigenous cultures—for it is this *difference*, and not the years of forced dispossession and colonization, which is maintaining the socioeconomic gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples (Mazel, 2009; de Costa, 2009; Pieterse, 2000).

The Indigenous Governance Project

Meanwhile, the Indigenous Governance Project is one of four main projects[8] currently set in motion by Reconciliation Australia with focuses on "recognizing and developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' central role in strengthening their communities" (Reconciliation Australia, 2012a). A large part of the framework for this project has been transposed from the Harvard Project on American Indian Governance and Economic Development in the U.S., whose central tenets (that sovereignty, culture, and institutions matter) have begun to impact government policies in Australia at both federal and state levels (Sullivan, 2006). The Indigenous Governance Project runs concurrent with Reconciliation Australia's focus

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[8] Three (out of four) of these projects are focused on the areas of development and capacity building projects for Indigenous peoples (Reconciliation Australia, 2012a).

on reducing the socioeconomic disparities experienced by Indigenous communities, and, as a corollary, the 'gap' between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. Governance is seen as the key to successful and sustainable socioeconomic development for Indigenous peoples within this approach.

Reconciliation Australia had its first national conference on Indigenous governance in 2002 (Dodson & Smith, 2003: 4). It has since created an online Indigenous Governance Toolkit meant as a resource for communities to guide in the process of setting up culturally-relevant governance institutions and procedures (Reconciliation Australia, 2012a). Beginning in 2005, Reconciliation Australia has held national Indigenous Governance Awards annually to highlight successful Indigenous governance projects (Reconciliation Australia, 2012a). Projects which have won awards include financial, health, and other service-delivery based organizations; land or resource development corporations; and organizations supporting Indigenous women, art, youth, and families (Thomas et Al., 2008).

A 2008 Governance Awards went to the Yawoorroong Miriuwung Gajerrong Yirrgeb Noong Dawang Aboriginal Corporation (MG Corporation), set up in 2005 following a successful land use agreement by the people of East Kimberly[9] (Thomas et Al., 2008: 14). The MG Corporation was set up to "receive and manage the benefits of development on their country" and "also works to keep Miriuwung Gajerrong law and culture alive and strong, and to the recognise the authority of, and to work with, the Kariel or elders" (Thomas et Al., 2008: 14). Accordingly, in addition to managing the "benefits and opportunities" flowing from the negotiated land use agreement on behalf of the Miriuwung Gejerrong people, the MG Corporation also has goals of "protecting the social and cultural well-being of the MG people"

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[9] When the Miriuwung Gajerrong People signed the Ord Final Agreement, they were required to create a resourced corporation (MG Corp) in order to "receive and manage the benefits to be transferred under the Agreement" (for more information, see http://yawoorroongmgcorp.com.au/).

(Thomas et Al., 2008: 14). The MG Corporation has "purposely aligned its structure with its cultural values, while also making sure that it fits the kartiya (whitefella) world" (Thomas et Al., 2008: 15).

The Indigenous Governance Project is closely related to the Indigenous rights agenda which seeks the recognition and restitution of Indigenous lands (Taylor et Al., 2012: 7). As Indigenous groups successfully negotiate land title agreements, the management and implementation of benefits are said to require a governance capacity capable of overseeing these tasks (Taylor et Al., 2012: 3; 7; Aubrey-Poiner & Phillips, 2010). As we saw in the case of the MG Corporation, this was a requirement of the successful claim itself. While this is not the sole purpose of the Indigenous Governance Project—for their best practices are said to extend (Reconciliation Australia, 2012a) to service delivery organizations as well as to any community governance body—this aspect of the project is closely related to economic development. As a study of the successful 2010 Yawuru Area Global Agreement agreement which created the Yawuru Native Title Holders Aboriginal Corporation reveals, beyond resolving native title claims in the Broome area, the agreement also settled heritage issues on land required for future development in Broome (Taylor et Al., 2012: 7). As such, "the Agreement makes land available for the development of residential and industrial areas, for tourism and for future airport development" (Taylor et Al., 2012: 7).

It was the use of governance tools 'based on the input from Indigenous cultures' that were seen to assist the Yawuru people in a dialogue between different native title holding groups in Broome who will be affected by the Broome liquefied natural gas development—"with the aim of building a concerted Aboriginal approach to managing the impacts of industrial development"—as well as a means by which to better parley with government and industry

leaders on the issue of economic development (Taylor et Al., 2012: 28). In this case, the specific governance tool praised for creating this capacity was that of the community-level survey (Taylor et Al., 2012: 28). The data collection and management conducted by the Yawuru people in the Broome area was upheld as a technique to ensure the "full and effective participation in governance and development planning" in the face of growing tourism, fishing, and resource exploration and development (Taylor et Al., 2012: 28).

Thus, the Indigenous Governance Project takes Indigenous cultures to be the basis for sustainable development (guided by the creation of legitimate governance institutions). This approach advances 1) the notion that that governance is the foundation for sustainable socioeconomic development within Indigenous communities; and 2) the idea that governance institutions, structures, and procedures must, at least to some degree, 'match' those culturally based standards and norms found within each community (Dodson & Smith, 2003: 19-20). Effective (and legitimate) governance is linked with culture, and further linked to successful sustainable socioeconomic development (see Sullivan, 2006; Dodson & Smith, 2003). Further, yet another key part of the Indigenous Governance strategy is that it places the locust of decision making at the local or community level. While prescriptions are made on a nation-wide basis (available in the 'Governance Toolkit' and other research publications), outlining general 'rules of the game' for how governance structures and principles should function, it is made clear that these decisions should be worked out at the local level with input from Indigenous communities themselves.

Post-Development Critique

While the later years of the Intervention measures involved a shift towards notions of "consent as an important factor in the process of engaging with difference" (Mazel, 2009: 497);

it was not until the Indigenous Governance Project that this engagement with 'difference' started to occur in a major way. Thus, these two policies (the Intervention and the Governance Project) are grounded in distinctly different logics—one which constructs Indigenous difference as something to be overcome to herald in modernity; the other which constructs Indigenous difference as the platform upon which legitimate governance institutions—as the basis for sustainable development—are to be based.

However, despite the Governance Project's privileging of genuine local decision-making and recognition that Indigenous cultural understandings are important for their governance institutions, certain aspects of this project make it appear as a less than desirable form of generating development within Indigenous communities—alternative or not—and for transforming Indigenous-settler relations. In the big picture, the Governance Project focuses solely on the areas in which Indigenous peoples *do* have control, at the behest of any attempts to transform their structural relations with the state in any major way (Sullivan, 2006: 8). As Sullivan (2006) argues, while it may use the language of sovereignty, it is not really addressing sovereignty. As a post-development scholar might argue, the language of local-level decision making is constrained by a structural framework within which state actors maintain their authority over what can be viably achieved in these development efforts. While responsibility for implementing these measures, and for their relative 'success' or 'failure' may be divested by the state onto local communities, the state maintains its structural relationships with these communities and its subsequent (or at least perceived) authority over them.

Moreover, while the success achieved by Indigenous groups in native title negotiation processes *might* alter these relations, the requirement of culturally-relevant governance bodies to oversee the management of and distribution of benefits stemming from these agreements

constitutes merely another layer of governances within Indigenous communities (see Sullivan, 2006). And contrary to those institutions of governance currently existing within communities that are based on Indigenous social, political, and legal understandings, these new proposed structures of governance sought by the Governance Project are constrained by a 'best practices' framework for Indigenous governance. These 'best practices' are loosely derived from research conducted within specific Indigenous communities which then have come to be constructed as good guiding principles for all Indigenous communities; and as compatible with all Indigenous cultures and, coincidentally, economic development (Sullivan, 2006). As Dodson and Smith (2003: 19-20) write, while there is no 'one size fits all' model, we can distill from prior research "a set of guiding principles and core ingredients for building good governance in Indigenous communities" which "appear to be universally accepted as applying across cultural boundaries." The strengthening of the ingredients for good governance is believed to enhance a community's political and business stability, which is conducive to sustained socioeconomic development (Dodson & Smith, 2003: 20). However, these ingredients will only work "if community and regional organisations recognise their importance, and create local solutions to take them into account" (Dodson & Smith, 2003: 20).

As the critique from within the post-development camp would highlight, this takes the universal framework of development and makes it slightly less universal, though the addition of local 'choice' and the addition of 'culture' that is highly mediated by structures of power (Pieterse, 2000). Further, similar to the Intervention measures, it divests the lion's share of the responsibility for implementing these 'best practices' to the communities themselves without any real divestment of authority. This is reinforced by the Indigenous Governance Toolkit and by the

yearly Indigenous Governance Awards rewarding those groups and communities whom have followed these standards to achieve success.

What is more, the prescriptions made by the Governance Toolkit are still based on the overwhelming goal of achieving mainstream socioeconomic development within Indigenous communities. While it is acknowledged that there may be some disconnect between cultural values and "those (values) required by the world of business and administration," Dodson and Smith (2003: 19) put forth the notion of "cultural appropriateness with teeth." Governance must be informed by cultural standards if it is to be seen as legitimate by community members; but governing agreements also have to be functional—they must be "capable of responding and taking action in the contemporary environment" (Dodson & Smith, 2003: 19). As we saw from the Yawuru people's successful land title negotiation over the Broome area of Australia, the result of this Agreement made available land for the development of residential and industrial areas that was then seen to require certain types of governance bodies to oversee this process in a smoother and efficient manner (Taylor et Al., 2012: 7). While it may take as its precepts some insight from the culture of the Yawuru people in Broome, the sort of governance mechanisms sought here specifically are corporate bodies thought necessary for the successful economic development of the Broome area (Sullivan, 2006).

There has been no substantive attempt here to rethink the sort of development communities might want to achieve, and the governance mechanisms that might be best placed to achieve this (Pieterse, 2000; Sullivan, 2006). The focus remains on creating culturally-relevant governance tools to achieve the economic development needed to 'close the gap.' While (sustainable) development is now conceived of as requiring 'culturally-legitimate' governance institutions, the range of possibility for these institutions are still constrained by these

overarching mainstream economic development goals. As Sullivan (2006: 8) argues, the Indigenous Governance Project 1) does not explain what to do when culture clearly does not match the needs of enterprise (i.e. "when organisations are either illegitimate or legitimate but unsuccessful"); and 2) does not demonstrate how Indigenous political systems can be acknowledged if they are seen to be incompatible with mainstream good management or 'good development practice' (Sullivan, 2006: 8). For instance, many Aboriginal organisations in Australia have some aspects of communal culture (e.g. whereby the governing council is subject to communal special interest pressures, etc.) that has been rejected as a basis of good governance by the Project's research studies (Sullivan, 2006: 8).

Through this analysis, it becomes apparent that there is a significant amount of false promise in the Governance approach—culture is used as a window dressing to projects which remain overly concerned with achieving the conditions for economic development within Indigenous communities (Pieterse, 2000). This should not deny the fact that this policy approach provides a great deal more opportunities for Indigenous communities than the previously assessed framework (of Intervention measures). It is quite possible that communities could utilize central tenants recognized in this Governance Approach—the importance of culture and local autonomy—to reinforce their own claims to self-determination and inherent rights (Pieterse, 2000). As Hunt and Smith (2006: 26) highlight, given present power imbalances, attempts to find 'culture match' often do mean that Indigenous organizations are forced to comply with Western norms and program requirements. However, as we see from Ferguson (1990) in the context of South Africa, while development interventions may start with specific goals determined by powerful actors, they often result in unexpected consequences that cannot be controlled by these powerful actors alone.

Conclusion

As I hope my analysis of these two policy measures has made clear, these projects operating within the state-level reconciliation frame in Australia are conceiving of 'the gap' in relatively narrow social and economic terms related to the achievement of formal equality (see Altman, 2004). While the Indigenous Governance project may recognize the value of Indigenous cultures in creating effective governance bodies to oversee this socioeconomic development, the governance bodies themselves remain largely tied to those practices thought hospitable to mainstream economic development (see Sullivan, 2006). Further, in both policy approaches, the divestment of the responsibility for implementing these measures by the state has not been coupled with a transformation of structural relationships or the recognition of increased autonomy for Indigenous communities. While the Indigenous Governance Project certainly provides opportunities for Indigenous communities to utilize its frameworks to construct their own possibilities for development, the project overall is aimed at generalizing a specific set of 'cultural' attributes—those which best serve economic development—to be implemented across Indigenous communities in Australia. There is a danger in this process that, as these policy measures continue to be carried out, those genuine alternatives are precluded to the point where the envisioning of separate paths becomes less and less possible (see Bandias, Fuller & Holmes, 2012: 60).

The socioeconomic disadvantage entrenched and perpetuated through conquest and colonization within Indigenous communities needs to be addressed. However, this fact of socioeconomic disadvantage should not serve to legitimate further government intervention within Indigenous communities with the explicit goals of bringing Indigenous peoples into the mainstream economic life of the nation; nor should it result in a project that imposes a set of best

practices that are largely in line with the goals of mainstream economic development by which Indigenous communities ought to govern themselves. This situation is often constructed as urgent—Indigenous peoples face significant lower quality of life indicators than non-Indigenous Australians (Dodson, 1994). We saw this sort of logic take place during the 2007 Intervention, in which neocolonial measures were drafted within a 48 period in response to the so-called failure of self-determination, and of Indigenous ways of life writ large, to quell a situation that took hundreds of years of colonization and forcible displacement to become endemic (de Costa, 2009).

While I do not outline it here, I argue that there can be a viable response to issues of entrenched socioeconomic disadvantage within Indigenous communities that does not encourage action without forethought to the impacts of this action—one which encourages alternatives to the development enterprise itself; and which focuses on the strengthening of Indigenous legal, social and political modes of organization as a means to oversee interactions within communities, between communities and their lands and resources, and between communities and actors such as those in national and international government and corporate realms. The assumption that 'the gap' between Australian settlers on the one hand and relatively poorer Indigenous communities on the other needs to be closed in a manner that would allow Indigenous peoples to catch up to the rest is fundamentally flawed. Policy makers need to spend just as much time reimagining and reconceptualising 'the gap' as they do implementing measures with the goal of closing it. The ways that Indigenous communities choose to *alter* their lands, resources, and cultural understandings, as well as their relationships with the rest of Australian society, may look quite different from the direction that past policies of cooperation and partnership have sought. These alternatives may be non-state based altogether, and—while

they may stem from local or community-based solutions that account for Indigenous legal, social, and political orders—this does not mean that they cannot or do not represent significant challenges to the sovereignty of the state, and a means by which to transform the inequitable relationships which have existed for so long between Indigenous communities and the Australian state and settler society. Thus far, it seems unlikely that these sorts of alternatives (*to* development) will be forthcoming within the state-level reconciliation discourse.

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