



Imperial Mind between Context and Con-text

Dr. CHAAMI Amine *

University Center of Aflou (Algeria). Email: aminechaami87@gmail.com.

| Submitted | Accepted | Published |
|------------|------------|------------|
| 23/04/2021 | 17/05/2021 | 01/06/2021 |

Abstract:

The genocide of the Aborigines was the outcome of policies adopted and implemented by the founding fathers of Australia from the onset of British settlement. They were suddenly confronted with a hostile and alien force. The Aborigines were forced out of their traditional homes, hunted like wild animals, poisoned or shot, and confined to the harshest and most desolate climes. The effect of British settlement upon these people led to near extermination. The article exposes the traumatic experience of founding Australia. It is not for the sake of enlightenment or entertainment, but it is an attempt to reconcile between the Aborigines and the white settlers.

Keywords: *Aborigines, colonial burden, settlers, genocide, British*

1. INTRODUCTION

The (hi) story of founding Australia is effusively overflowed by secrets and the first meeting between Aboriginal people and European settlers is one of them. The national secret is commonly associated with shame and that is why; Australians do not seem to be proud of this secret in their history. The significance of the article is in rewriting the history of settlement, and accordingly exposing the violent part in the story of the founding fathers. It attempts to restore of what had conventionally been forgotten or relegated to an absolute silence from the story of founding Australia. It is the first step in deconstructing the official version of Australian history and paving the way for reconciliation. Therefore, the study attempts to go beyond the notion that those in relative positions of power can just tell the stories of those in the margins. A quest of the paper is for finding and paving the way for negotiating with the historical reality of dispossessing the Aborigines, and how the Australian nation can or should address or work through the burden of the Aboriginal past in the present? The construction of a viewpoint from which the story of others is silenced for justifying land dispossession. The secret of the first encounter between the Aborigines and the convict is suppressed

* Corresponding author



to give a praiseworthy souvenir for the founding fathers. It is intentionally concealed for gliding the picture of the early settlers of Australia.

1. A Nightmare of Violence and a Dream of Tolerance

Taking up land from the Aborigines in Australia is associated a national shame because of the way of taking it away from them. The land is not legally owned by the colonizers. It does not belong to them. Therefore, the land is taken up by an act of stealing. Exposing the way of dispossessing the Aborigines is a buckle of the ideal image of the founding fathers. Thus, it traces back the association of hostility and indignity. The transgression of the Aborigines rights are written out of Australian history. It is lurches with the sense of shame. This sense of being complicit by shame goes hand in hand with empathy for the sake of assuming the liability because complicity cannot go without being acknowledged .

The colonizer has the choice to serve his sentence in New South Wales instead of undergoing a death sentence in London. He is as a quarry of poverty in England, and as an executor of the Aborigines in Australia. The two contrasting portrayals serve to offer an admission of guilt for the Aborigines. By presenting the life of in London and then in New South Wales, it is stated that the white settlers have no choice but to commit the crime of exterminating them .

2. The Groundless Thesis of Violence:

The occurrence of violence is for the sake of acknowledging Australia's traumatic past. It adds salt to injury by making the colonizers realize that Aboriginal people are not that different from him. By doing so, the colonizer does not legitimate the existence of white settlers to see Aboriginal people as 'the other' against whom it is unproblematic to decimate them. The traditional way of life and the culture were disrupted, and Aboriginal people become increasingly marginalized. They are about to lose everything, and they were no longer allowed to live as they had done for tens of thousands of years. They are not able to become equal partners with white settlers who had taken their land. The necessity to speak up the misery which is experienced by Aboriginal people has become a mainstream concern for Australians. As the founding fathers of Australia pound the foundation of the nation.

The Aboriginal man is described as almost the contrary of the white man, almost as something coming from a man's thoughts. "His skin swallowed the light and made him not quite real, something only imagined" (Grenville,2005:7). The spear that the black man is carrying with him "was part of him, an extension of the arm" (ibid).

The prominence is deposited on the spear when its qualities are described: “It would not go through a man neat as a needle. It would rip its way in. Pulling it out would rip all over again” (2005:8). It is a reminiscent image that announces the irksome occurrence about to take place. The Aboriginal charisma is surrounded by “Tales came back of men speared, their huts robbed, their fields burned. The Gazette had a handy expression that covered all the things the blacks did, and suggested others: outrages and depredations”(2005:53).

The colonizer is directly confronted with the atrocities performed. He realizes the price of stealing the land from the Aborigines. Once the colonizer has taken up the plot of land along the river, the Aboriginal presence is perceptible. Therefore, the colonizer recognizes that the land does not belong to him. He legitimates his own act of stealing by stating that “there were no signs that the blacks felt the place belonged to them” (Grenville,2005:52). They start stealing from his harvest. As he dwells on his scrap of land, he finds out that the land is not without owners, “It took him some time to admit to himself that his hundred acres no longer felt quite his own” (2005:104). He realizes that the Aborigines have lived there long before his existence either in England or in Australia.

The two hundred years of Australian past history has been dominated and formulated by the colonizers. The official representation of the land of Australia has been written by the colonizers to construct an official version of the Australian history. This official version of history has ensured the subjugation and marginalization of Aboriginal people. Therefore, the real story of founding Australia is achieved by the counter-discourse that interrupts the apparent homogeneity of white historiography and foreground previously subjugated and biased version of history. The representation of *terra nullius* has been biased, and stated against Aboriginal existence. As the colonizers claimed sovereignty over this country in 1788 and colonized the land as *terra nullius*, the Aboriginal people were subject to grave injustices and endure the consequences of *terra nullius*. They did not only undergo the loss of their land, but also dilapidation, devastation, and dehumanization. The stereotypes are inherited through time, still living within the present times. Nonetheless, it is not possible to give the description of authenticity in the way of representing Aboriginal people. The representations of Aboriginal people that can be found in Australian history are very far from being the ambassador of the original people of Australia. Hence, the aim is not to get a confirmable, or a veritable version of Australian history, but to create an other that when it is faced with the white settlers; it aids to legitimize their presence in the land. By framing the Aboriginal people as ridiculous, spiritual, and primordial, the colonizers rejoice themselves and their moral and cultural superiority in Australia.

3. The Colonial Version of Reality:

The white settlers claim to have the right for taking up the land after the official declaration of the government that: “On occasion of any native coming armed [...] to any farm belonging to British subjects [...]they are then to be driven away by force of arms”(Grenville,2005:140). The right is also empowered after the brutal murder of Sagitty by the Aborigines. When Sagitty is found, he is just about to die. In a final attempt to save him, William brings him to Sydney by boat only to witness him die. After the obnoxious incident, the white settlers gather to plan for the reprisal. Therefore, there is no point of turning back, and he tries to make himself invisible, he wishes that he was not there because he knows that at this very moment he will be asked to make a choice: to step away from it all and lose any hope of being able to survive in this rugged country or to participate and fully play the part of the executor. He has no choice. As a result, Thornhill gives up his will for the choice of exterminating Aboriginal people. Before he finishes the business of exterminating the Aborigines, it is not possible to escape the feeling of guilt, and he fully acknowledges his involvement in connivance .

It guarantees that the admission of guilt and the traumatic colonial experience of taking up the land are the inauguration for the process of reconciliation . Therefore, Grenville demonstrates the state of Thornhill in the sprain of Aboriginal’s life : “And yet their lives, like his, had somehow brought them to this: waiting for the tide to turn, so they could go and do what only the worst of men would do” (2005:156). His life before taking up the land is not his life after doing so.

The feeling of guilt for the Aborigine’s plight is the title of his life in Australia. In the process of exterminating the Aboriginal community, Thornhill is forced to shoot an Aboriginal man, Whisker Harry. He loses his humanitarian feelings : “Like the old man on his knees he felt he might become something other than a human, something that did not do things in this sticky clearing that could never be undone” (Grenville,2005:160). The life of Thornhill has nurtured in an atmosphere of poverty,he keeps himself and his family alive by stealing. However, his life will change when he has the option to escape the death penalty by sailing to Australia. It is for him the land of opportunities. Therefore, he grosses his pardon and dreams in the possibility of owning a plot of land. When he arrives in Australia, Thornhill is bemused by conforing that the land has already been owned and peopled by the Aborigines. He has no choice but to take it away from its owners. William sails along the Hawkesbury River with Blackwood, he spots a plot of land and falls in love with it, “No one had ever

spoken to him of how a man might fall in love with a piece of ground” (Grenville,2005:58). From this moment on, it is his dream to own this plot of land and he is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure this dream comes true. It is impossible to stop him, “It was a piercing hunger in his guts: to own it. To say mine, in a way he had never been able to say mine of anything at all [...] It was something he wanted so much” (ibid).

After taking up the land for himself, there is an inveteration for keeping the possession of his plot of land. The potency of his existence in Australia is realized by the protection of his piece of land. Therefore, every action is a calculation for protecting his land. He establishes a thriving business and a magnificent mansion. The Aborigines have not troubled him in the novel, but Grenville does not allocate him to feel pleased. His dream of taking up the land comes at a cost, and accordingly Thornhill will suffer a lifelong burden of guilt.

The feeling of guilt is dawdled until the end of the story. When Thornhill wants to relax, and he sits on his veranda on a specific bench “the bench he sat on here felt at times like a punishment” (Grenville,2005:173). His desire for the possession of land shades his sense of veridiction. The feelings of compunction and remorse come after the dispossession of Aboriginal people. It is not possible to deny what has happened from following his hunger for possessing the land. The encumber of guilt will endure for the rest of his life.

Thereafter, the value and significance of reconciliation in Australia is clear. It aims to address the past, improve intercultural relations, and redress the extreme disadvantages of Aboriginal people in Australia. It is a necessity to start to the process of reconciliation because it is a practical contribution for the tenacity of terra nullius in Australia. It is for the welfare of all the people of Australia, and of the land itself. The history of the relationships between the colonized and the colonizer in Australia has left shameful stamp in the history of humanity. The way to overturn terra nullius is the way to reconcile with one another, to deal with their violent past of Australia, and also to build new relationships which are ideally based on mutual respect between the inhabitants of the land. It is accepted that reconciliation is based on restoring the right and spotting the duty.

4. CONCLUSION:

The recognition of the violent way of taking the land away from the Abrogines is the essence for an understanding of Australian history. The legend of terra nullius is set up for excluding Aboriginal people from owning and belonging to the land of their forefathers. The acknowledgement of the rights of Aboriginal people and the confession of their dispossession are the outline for reconciliation between the Aborigines and the white settlers. It is the desire to make amends for

the past atrocities, and to recognize the status of Aboriginal people. The process of reconciliation between Aboriginal people and the white settlers is for finding, undertaking and resolving the aftermath of colonization. Thus, it involves integrity, acknowledgment and honesty, and therefore it helps all Australians to move forward and live together. The present of Australia is burdened by a story of which it has not previously spoken. Offering an apology to Aboriginal people allows for this history to be acknowledged and spoken of. Therefore, the breaking silence, the accepting responsibility for past injustices and the apologizing are the pillars of reconciliation. It is for creating a space for reconciliation, and demands an understanding and a rejection of the legal fiction of *terra nullius*. Aboriginal dispossession and extermination is legalized in the name of *terra nullius* and deprived Aboriginal people from being the owners of land. The appliance of *terra nullius* is for ignoring Aboriginal people voices, perspectives, and experiences. It denies them the right and the ability to challenge the injustices of the past. The land was taken by the colonizers on the basis that it was an empty land. The legal fiction of *terra nullius* legitimates and justifies the dispossession of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people continue to suffer the impact of *terra nullius*'s mistreatment of them. Aboriginal people in Australia suffered currently from the cruel experience of taking up the land from them. Without overturning the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, the future of Aboriginal people will be miserable. One promising way to lift them up in future times is the move toward reconciliation.

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