

The Scale Politics of Reconciliation

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DECLARATION

I, Sherrie Ann Cross, certify that the research embodied in this thesis is original; that the ideas of others used in the research have been duly cited; and that this thesis (and parts thereof) have not been used towards a degree at other institutions of tertiary education. Ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee 27JUL2001-D042 and HE27AUG2004-DO3091.

(Sherrie Ann Cross)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis shows that Indigenous self determination is impossible without a fundamental restructuring of the political relations between Indigenous communities and Australian federal governments. Continuing colonial relations are examined through the case study of reconciliation policy as a phenomenon of political scaling.

The scaled processes, procedures and structures of the policy are examined through interviews with two groups:

- 1) Members of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and politicians with portfolio responsibility for the policy; and
- 2) Members of Indigenous local and discursive communities

This exercise provides insight into how the scaled mechanisms of the policy—as reflected in the community consultations for constructing the documents of reconciliation—enacted different sets of processes in different domains. At the public level, the scaled consultative processes were represented as a democratic exercise that privileged Indigenous participation at national and local levels. Simultaneously, the national scale at which policy agents operated integrated them with government policy and the limited options that it provided for Indigenous self determination. For Indigenous communities, the scaled policy mechanisms deepened the imposition of government agendas and facilitated a multi-scaled management of dissent. This management operated at various scales through exclusion, marginalisation, repression, bureaucratic expedience and manipulation of public Indigenous discourse.

These various processes are conceptualised as scale erasure. The assertion of colonial power through a series of government top-down scaled structures and mechanisms produced an erasure of Indigenous scales of governance. This study shows that Indigenous community governance is a diverse, active, ongoing and changing domain, which spans urban, rural/regional and remote, as well as discursive contexts. These are all conceived of as Contemporary Indigenous Governances because they are the contemporary outcomes of historical and geographical processes, and of contemporary Indigenous community agency. Yet the scales at which these governances operate and could be extended for formal representation have been truncated and erased by successive colonial government policies.

This thesis highlights 1) the fundamental philosophical, political and procedural differences between top-down government policy, and that which could be constructed from, and accountable to Indigenous communities and 2) the prospect of the latter for the construction of sustainable self-determination.

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