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# EDDIE KOIKI MABO

## LECTURE SERIES

Our Identity on Our Terms (2010)

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University of Technology  
2010 Queensland’s Australian of the Year**

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## The Eddie Koiki Mabo Lecture 2010

# Our identity on our terms

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### Dr Chris Sarra

It's a great honour and privilege to be asked here to deliver a lecture designed to honour a great Australian – Eddie 'Koiki' Mabo. And I say Australian deliberately, because I want to emphasise that although Mr Mabo was a very unique individual and a Torres Strait Islander, he was also a very great Australian.

Tonight I want to examine some notions of identity and contemplate what some of this might mean for all Australians. In doing so I have no intention of visiting the past to find means to divide Australians from one another, nor however have I any intention of saying what I know would make me popular among white Australians. As an Aboriginal Australian I am fully aware of the suffering and marginalisation and the injustices that many Indigenous Australians endure in the areas of health, justice and education. I've travelled throughout Australia and seen suffering, disadvantage, and impoverishment but I've also seen Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islander people, do all they can to raise our people up and inject and realise a sense of hope. One of the greatest of these people was Eddie 'Koiki' Mabo.

At the heart of Mr Mabo's heroic endeavours on behalf of Indigenous people of Australia, was an attachment to country. This attachment is qualitatively different from the relationship to land that prevails in mainstream Australia. But white Australia must make the effort to come to terms with the full meaning of what country means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, as it is a crucial part of our Indigenous identity.

It is then Mr Mabo's gift to all Australians that he helped to keep alive a notion of a relationship to the land, where the land was not a commodity that stands outside of us and exists only to be bought and sold. For Mr Mabo and Indigenous Australians, the land is a part of us and we are part of it.

This is not for a moment to relinquish any right to prosper from the use of our land in a modern society. We need to build then on Mr Mabo's achievements to understand ourselves as a people.

At this point, let me offer an intellectual concept devised by a friend of mine and a philosopher - Roy Bhaskar who works at the London Institute of Education - which might enable us to better contemplate a more harmonious Australia.

Roy Bhaskar discusses the concept of the 'concrete universal' which has four dimensions. At its base is the notion of a core universal human nature. We are all of the human race and this should ensure unquestionable grounds for human rights. At a higher level this core is acted upon or mediated through a variety of differentia such as gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, etcetera. The core and the mediations result in a concretely singularised individual. The fourth dimension to this concept is that of processuality, or the rhythms of time and action. The key to understanding the importance of the concept of the 'concrete universal' is that it is part of a stratified ontology. Put simply, each of us has

our humanity at its core, but various layers or stratifications of being. As well, the notion of processuality allows one to recognise at different times in the life of an individual, the mediations or the individuality of the core humaneness and whether that will be of greater or less salience. A good example of this - and indulge me here - is reflected in those times of the year when we cheer loudest for the Cowboys throughout the year, and then cheer for Queensland during State of Origin matches, and then cheer for Australia when they play tests against England or New Zealand.

So my point here is that at different times there are different layers of being. The concept of a stratified ontology also enables us to escape entanglement in the seemingly intractable dualities such as the individual versus the community. From the 'concrete universal' we can see that we can indeed be individual and we can be community.

Applied to Indigenous Australians the core universal humanity guarantees or should guarantee - as I've said here - our access to human rights. The mediations for us of course can include clan, family group, language group, country, murris, kooris, etcetera. If we can honour the core humanity of Indigenous Australians and its mediations then we can perhaps begin to appreciate that we dishonour these dynamics when we do things like deploy forceful mechanisms and stealth such as cutting basic social security payments to individuals if they do not succumb to economic forces and move off country to provincial locations. These mechanisms dishonour and diminish mediations of cultural significance. Let me give an example here of how this plays out in the space of traditional Aboriginal art.

If we appreciate authentic visual Aboriginal cultural artwork, we must understand that its authenticity emerges from a connection to country. It is not just about putting designs on canvas within the proximity of tourists who might buy them or indeed some other point of demand. Traditional Aboriginal art is about culture; is about connectedness to country. To dishonour any of these mediations is to diminish any sense of authenticity.

For Mr Mabo, in his efforts to assert his title rights on his country, various mediations were no doubt at play. He was a Murray Islander; a Torres Strait Islander; an Indigenous Australian; an Australian; and at his core, a very decent human being with rights worthy of acknowledgement and honour.

The will and the capacity to acknowledge and honour the humanity of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander Australians has indeed presented challenges for many Australians – not all, but for many. If we can seriously attend to this challenge then we can begin to understand that in many ways our differences at our core may not be as great as we think. Yet at our mediations and differentia we can be tremendously and richly diverse, all of which is okay. As we do this, we will acknowledge and embrace the core humanity of others.

This is important for two reasons. Firstly, when we acknowledge one's core humanity we acknowledge that regardless of how complex their lives might be they have the capacity to rise above challenges they face, which in turn means we must be intent on creating and sustaining an environment and services that enables such capacity. Secondly, we acknowledge one's human right to a chance. In our country, everyone deserves a fair go, or so we say.

One of the richest men in Australia Twiggy Forrest has decided it is time to end disadvantage in Indigenous communities. Having met Twiggy Forrest on several occasions it's clear to me that his motives are somewhat pure, although I don't think he will mind me suggesting that there is room to question his sense of understanding about what it is that is actually broken. A glance at his [Generationone.org](http://Generationone.org) website reveals a range of social discrepancies that have persisted in Australia for as far as I can remember. Sadly, there is nothing new about the discrepancies exposed here by Twiggy and his Generation One website. Such discrepancies were perhaps first quantified comprehensively by Mick Miller in the Mick Miller review into Aboriginal employment and training way back in 1984.

What is significant about the Forrest push to make a difference is that it is at long last backed by significant white Australian leadership in a way that promises to rally prominent media players as well as a generation of young Australians buoyed by the Australian Government apology to those of the stolen generations and keen to ensure that it counts for something in a way that sees an end to Indigenous disadvantage.

All of this is promising, but has the potential to be futile if we fail to recognise what might be considered the true cause of Indigenous disadvantage. For white Australia part of this means having to acknowledge the perceptions of Indigenous people and the extent to which they have failed to embrace them positively. To me, this is what seems to be closer to the true cause: this inability to acknowledge and honour the humanity of Aboriginal people and the humanity of Torres Strait Islander people. There is much to be said for embracing the core humanity of Indigenous people positively in an effort to affect positive change.

As principal at Cherbourg School in Queensland the strong and smart approach was a philosophy designed precisely to do this by signalling to students a very prominent belief that they had a human right to a quality education and in a way that enhanced their sense of cultural identity. This approach saw some very positive results.

In an effort to extrapolate such positive outcomes for Indigenous children in schools throughout Australia, I've been fortunate enough to establish the Stronger Smarter Institute. At our institute, we've established the Stronger Smarter Philosophy, which has proven to underpin success in the pursuit of improved outcomes for Indigenous students in schools.

The Stronger Smarter Philosophy is somewhat articulated as follows. It's about acknowledging, embracing and developing a positive sense of identity; acknowledging and embracing Indigenous leadership; innovative and dynamic school models in complex social and cultural contexts; innovative and dynamic approaches to school staffing; and it's about high expectations leadership to ensure high expectations classrooms with high expectations teacher to student relationships.

As far as rhetoric goes the Stronger Smarter Philosophy is probably as sexy as any rhetoric that's been developed by government. Converting this rhetoric to reality remains just as challenging and for the remainder of this paper I want to focus on two problem areas in this regard. Firstly, I want to examine the extent to which a positive sense of Indigenous identity is adequately understood; and secondly, let me explore some complexities around notions of Indigenous leadership.

For the moment though, can I just make this point clear; that for this part of the discussion which will refer to some of my PhD research – the focus was on matters pertaining to Aboriginal people not Torres Strait Islanders, although I am very confident in assuming that the dynamics at play are quite similar.

My own empirical research as well as countless anecdotal information readily available in everyday conversations, suggests that mainstream Australians often have negative perceptions of Aboriginal people.

As we all know, perception is interpretation not reality so it should also be no surprise at the tendency for people to have negative views of people or groups of people they have never interacted with.

For the purposes of my research I conducted 30 forums involving more than 2000 people at which I asked participants to offer adjectives or words to describe or to articulate mainstream Australian perceptions of Aboriginal people. I was very cautious to point out at each forum that I was not after their personal perceptions, but I wanted them to share with me how they thought mainstream Australia - whatever that was – how they would describe Aboriginal people. Now, I don't want to

scare you with this, but I can warn you that the picture is not that flash. I want to offer to you a list of words that appeared on every occasion. Of the 30 forums, these words, or types of words appeared at 30 forums:

- Alcoholics, drunks, heavy drinkers
- Boongs, coons, niggers, black bastards, gins, darkies
- Got it good, privileged, well kept by government
- Lazy, won't work
- Welfare dependent, dole bludgers, handout syndrome
- Aggressive, violent, troublemakers, disrespectful

You might wonder why these are all pejoratives or there's nothing positive listed here, and I should say that on many occasions there were positive references to Aboriginal people. 28 times in fact, people said family oriented - those kinds of things – artistic, sporty. For now though, I just want to make the point that these were the words presented on every occasion and that exposes a problem.

This is certainly not who we are as Aboriginal people. This isn't to deny that we have these elements our communities who might look like this from time to time as all communities do. But it is to affirm that these descriptors are not part of the Indigenous cultural identity. These are stereotypes which have been held out for us and in some occasions, tragically, we have bought these perceptions.

While they're not real, their dynamic presence has a dramatic effect as it typecasts an entire group of Australians as some kind of feared or despised other. As noted by MacLennan and Mitropolous - Dr Gary MacLennan, also another very good friend and mentor of mine - in his discussions about notions of a differentiated other. The clue to understanding a differentiated other is seeing this notion of other as part of a binary in which we have 'same' and 'other'.

In the Australian context this might be contemplated as mainstream Australia – whatever that might be – and the 'other' is the rest. It is worth taking the time to reflect on this binary and their differential notions of being 'other'. If you reflect on the previous slide, there is a stigma about Aboriginal people as an other. And I refer to Goffman here who explains what happens in this context.

*“The attitudes we normals (those without the stigmatised attribute) have towards the person with stigma, and the actions we take in regard to him, are well known, since these responses are what benevolent social action is designed to soften and ameliorate. By definition of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he represents, sometimes rationalising an animosity based on other differences, such as those of social class. We use specific stigma terms such as cripple, bastard, moron in our daily discourse without giving thought to the original meaning. We impute a wide range of imperfections on the basis of the original one...” (Goffman, 1986: 15 - 16)*

Aboriginal people in the feared, despised 'other' realm then occupy that slot of the untermensch: the less than human. MacLennan and Mitropolous in their discussion on the differentiated other also explain the notion of the 'pitiably other'. This is the other that features in advertisements for organisations such as World Vision. It is the kind of other that runs the risk of appearing in the Gen One campaign. Here, fame looks upon the other in pity. It is the slot where we are patronised and subjected to the tender mercies of charities. The pitiable other can also be described as the victim, and tragically for too many Aboriginal people, this has been interiorised to the extent that some of us consider this victim status as part of our cultural identity.



There is also the slight of the 'comical other' which is often laughed at and considered quite harmless, good for a few giggles. This kind of other is often palatable to the dominant sane and having them around for entertainment promotes a sense of freedom from guilt. This type of other is best deployed by sane when they are challenged about the use of racist terms or racist comedy. We've seen examples of this.

The 'resource other' makes sense to me when I think of those Aborigines, some of the people who I knew and still know, who cleared trees around Cherbourg for white settlers around Murgon and Wandai. Often they worked for meagre wages or rations or often worked for nothing. In his histories at the settlement, Tom Blake supplies us with a typical instance:

*"One person in the Murgon district who took full advantage of the settlement labour was Barambah [Cherbourg] Superintendent, Albert Tronson. Six months after his arrival at Barambah, his wife acquired two 65 ha blocks at Cloyna, fifteen miles away from the settlement. With the help of at times eight men from the settlement, rapid progress was made on the Tronson selection. He admitted that in just six months he was able to have a house, barn and pigsty erected, as well as having cleared about 36 hectares of scrub... and planted about 20 ha of corn and pumpkins" (Blake, 2001: 122).*

I think also in the context of this, Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as resource other, what I think of stolen wages, stolen by successive Queensland governments from 1897 to 1992 under the so-called Protection Act estimated "...thousands of Aboriginal workers across several generations lost an estimated \$500 million because of the Queensland Government's negligence, through diverting withheld wages to raise government revenue, and through misuse of Trust monies" (NTEU, 2004).

MacLennan and Mitropolous' next category of differentiated other is that of the exotic. This kind of other is of the ideology of romanticism, and as MacLennan and Mitropolous point out, the staple diet of the tourist industry. Here, Indigenous people are seen as the noble savage; the last relic of the world before modernity; the sign that the world was once thoroughly enchanted. Having Aborigines typecast as this form of exotic other explains how some educators and some anthropologists strive to ensure that Indigenous people have no access to a quality western education that will enable mobility in modern economies. This is a position that might serve the interests of those types who can enjoy a connection to relics of the past, while at the same time flit in and out of those communities in a way that is functional for them. This position does very little to serve the interests of Indigenous people however, who are stuck, effectively, in a circumstance where they remain relics of the past, with little or no skill or choice about accessing other societies in any way that is functional. Whilst I've heard many Indigenous Australians articulate a desire to retain a connection to ancient ways and practices, I have never heard any articulate a desire to be rendered dysfunctional in the context of modern economies and societies as a result.

Michelle Tuhiwai Smith blends the notion of the exotic other and the resource other in her discussion of Indigenous culture as a commodity for trading and appropriation. When she wrote of the spirituality industry she said:

*"Spirituality will continue to expand as people, particularly those in First World nations, become uncertain about their identities, rights, privileges and very existence. New Age groups currently appropriate Indigenous spiritual beliefs at will; some claim to be inhabited by Indigenous spirit guides while others merely interpret their own (individualised) dreams as an Indigenous spiritual experience. Writers and poets have also created a mystique around their work which, as Wendy Rose has argued, aspires to 'embody the Indian', in effect 'becoming the "real" Indian'. Despite protestations that spirituality is an experience through which non-Indigenous people aim to help people, it is clearly a profitable experience (Smith, 1999: 102).*

In an Australian context while all of these forms of differentiated others present a range of complexities worth contemplating the most deeply problematic of these forms of other is that of the feared, despised or pitiable other. It is against this background tolerating poor conditions in Aboriginal communities and Torres Strait Islander communities becomes explainable. Put simply, if it is only Aborigines, then why would we bother trying to make a difference? If it is only Indigenous people, then what is the big deal? If it is only Aborigines, then what is the big deal if a police officer is found to cause the death of one of them? If it is only Indigenous communities, then why bother injecting quality teachers and health workers when we can just continue to blame the community for such appalling dysfunction?

It is the casting of Indigenous Australians as a feared, despised or pitiable other which enables such disobliging cycles of chronic neglect and draconian intervention. Intervention in terms of dispossession and alienation from land; neglect in terms of leaving people to die. Intervention in terms of assimilation policies; neglect in terms of failure to provide adequate infrastructure and quality service provision.

At this point in this disobliging cycle, I speak of casting Indigenous people as hopeless and despicable. It is this casting Indigenous people as hopeless and despicable that has enabled the Northern Territory intervention to unravel, in which it is assumed that people are so hopeless and so despicable that we have to send the army in from the outside to fix them. And we must paradoxically empower people to spend money appropriately by quarantining their income. Time will tell whether or not we will indeed transcend beyond this disobliging cycle. There is of course much more complexity to this discussion and the scope of this lecture enables one to simply touch on this matter.

Similarly, one can only touch on the complexities of embracing Indigenous leadership in a way that is quite basic. But let me do this now. The second pillar, if you like, of the Stronger Smarter Philosophy signals the need to embrace Indigenous leadership. Again, this is not so straightforward.

In my own assessments of Indigenous leadership over time, there seems to be at least three categories of leadership worth observing (this is not to say that this is the entire category). First are those who are intent on being the victim; those leaders who make use of the victim culture. Second are those who focus on booting the victim; those who find political leverage in denigrating Indigenous people to be part of their tough love strategy. And third, those who look beyond the victim; those who embrace a positive Indigenous cultural identity as complimentary, if not essential to success, rather than an impediment to it.

Many Indigenous Australians, and indeed many Indigenous communities around the world have come to be seen and in turn see themselves as victims of history. It is clear that our colonial histories have left us with the idea that Indigenous people are victims and the colonisers are the victimisers. In adhering to our victim culture, the two – the victim and the victimiser – are co-dependent. They need each other, otherwise the culture couldn't exist.

Some years ago it was my belief that when school leadership and community leadership walked in partnership then positive results would emerge. I honestly believed that. I had to change this position after seeing for myself school leadership and community leadership walking in partnership but both colluding with victim status. The relationship could be described as highly functional, but only for the purposes of colluding with low expectations of Indigenous students. For instance, students were not turning up to school to start at 9am which was the expected time to commence at any school in the country. The collaborative response from school and community leadership was to acknowledge this and just make school starting time 10 o'clock, effectively lowering the bar of expectation. Some will argue that the manoeuvre of delaying the school starting time from 9am to 10am is being culturally receptive to the needs of students. My argument is that such a strategy is clearly collusion with victim status or low expectations.



Over the years, Australian governments for its part have either affirmed or denied the role as victimiser, depending on the politics of the day, and in turn Indigenous communities have either affirmed or attempted to shed light on their victimisation depending on the counter-politics of the day. Some Indigenous leaders have found success in encouraging victimhood, leading a cause that leaves Indigenous people powerless to act on our own behalf and therefore at the mercy of those in political power. They're encouraged to see themselves as victims, victims who should be compensated in some way or every way by the victimisers for their historical grievances.

Psychologist Dr Ofer Zur observes:

*"In claiming the status of victim and by assailing all blame to others, a person can achieve moral superiority while simultaneously disowning any responsibility for one's behaviour and its outcome. The victim 'merely' seeks justice and fairness. If they become violent, it is only as a fair resort in self-defence. The victim stance is a powerful one. The victim is always morally right, neither responsible nor accountable, and forever entitled to sympathy."*

Leading through victim status entails pushing for preferential treatment, as will all Indigenous leaders to some extent, but in this model Indigenous communities are likely to be seen as mere receivers of service rather than as creators of emancipatory processes. Under this type of leadership government will do things to Indigenous communities not with them. Adhering strictly to victim status means that Indigenous people are not responsible for their own lives and are what Malcolm X calls 'zombies marching to the beat of someone else's orders'.

Let me talk about those who boot the victim. There are those who have discovered that while being the victim is compelling at some levels, it is not always politically attractive. Therefore another group of Indigenous leaders have found political traction by booting the victims. It is arguable that being the victim and booting the victim type leadership, both subscribe in ways to the notion that Indigenous people are a kind of other that is considered pitiable, hopeless, feared or despicable.

The booting the victim type leadership is deeply problematic for a range of reasons. At one level it dismisses the genuine complexity of Indigenous people's story. Such complexity is perhaps dismissed by this type of Indigenous leadership because it is either not completely understood or not completely experienced. There is indeed another explanation which can be offered here. There is every chance that the complexities of dysfunction in communities are indeed understood by those Indigenous leaders who boot the victims. But in the discourse with the political or corporate 'white masters' this leadership will proffer the view that on such complexity the deficits or the causes of this dysfunction resides primarily with Indigenous people. At the same time they will pretend there is no room to question those same political and corporate masters who may indeed be central to the complexity of dysfunction in those communities. Put simply, they avoid articulating the unpalatable message that needs to be heard, and only tell the political and corporate masters what they want to hear.

The bleating of this kind of leadership can be music to the ears and readily attracts attention, celebration and generous rewards. One of those apparent rewards is to be described as honest and courageous, when in fact this is not entirely true. So ensues a seductive yet toxic relationship in which particular individuals may attract handsome rewards and leave other Indigenous people to ensure costly, clumsy, simplistic approaches to policy reform. Even worse, if such clumsy approaches to policy reform fail, we simply encounter another means to boot the victim yet again like the resulting failure is somehow their fault. Either this or the data is embellished and stacked in a way that even the clumsiest ideas can appear successful.

The deeper problem here is that such views proffered by this kind of Aboriginal leadership and Torres Strait Islander leadership validates the ignorance of political and corporate masters with the power to make significant change. It makes it okay for them to be ignorant about the things they need to

understand. There becomes no need for such masters to have to engage and understand the very deep complexities of Indigenous people and Indigenous communities. When those political and corporate masters are challenged morally or intellectually about the merits of their beliefs or actions relating to Aboriginal communities they simply now have the luxury of disengaging from any robust scrutiny or dialogue by saying “well, I agree with my pet Aborigine.”

There is therefore little discussion about some of the constraints faced by Indigenous communities; be it physical, psychological or situational. Clearly there are situational constraints for many Indigenous people in both urban and rural communities and remote communities that are simply overlooked, such as access to quality infrastructure like roads, public transport, sanitation, properly staffed hospitals and health centres. In my own field of education, serious concerns about the extent of properly staffed schools with quality teachers that are culturally competent.

Some may choose to see booting the victim as a kind of tough love, but is it really? Since blame is a psychological construct, there are inherent biases at play: when we blame people for outcomes they cannot control based on expectations that they didn't develop. There is an overabundance of information to be found and used as proof that Indigenous people are the cause of our own misery. This is possible, according to American psychologist Mark Alicke because the evidential standards for blame are usually lowered especially when people are specifically seeking information to support their blame attribution. Intentionally or unintentionally we engage in what he calls 'biased information search' in order to support our desire to blame the victim for their unfavourable condition.

These selective data processes enable the deficit to appear to reside in Indigenous communities when in fact this may not be the truth. For example, in my field of education chronic poor student performance in literacy might signal poor student ability but the very same data viewed from another angle can easily signal dramatic teacher incompetence and laziness.

Whilst history has no doubt dealt our people a questionable hand, there's no need to wallow in it such that it cripples us from acting and creating better present and futures for our communities. When one is busy being the victim or booting the victim very rarely does one stop and ask: what am I doing that's contributing to this dysfunction? What am I doing that's contributing to disadvantage and victimisation of our people?

As Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander Australians, we do have to be accountable for our actions. We've never pretended that that's not the case. We do have to have the hard and honest conversations. Researchers like Zur have shown that the victim culture and victim blaming have not been very helpful, and in fact they have led to further victimisation.

It is time that we moved beyond the victim, as indeed many have done so already. This is not to say that we should not look critically at our communities and behaviours within our families and communities that are destructive to ourselves and others. This is also not to shut out from discussions those who have actively been marginalised by government policies or corporate developments.

We have to act under the principles of self-determination, not in the political sense, but in the psychological sense in that we have the power to shape our present and our future. In fact it is our responsibility to do so and it is worth reinvoking Roy Bhaskar's concept of the concrete universal at the core of which is our humanity and mediating from this is our cultural identity. Despite what some anthropologists have implied lately, our cultural identity is not a weakness. It is a strength. Neither the mainstream nor government can give us honour and dignity. It resides in us already. It is not something others give to us, therefore it is not something others can take away from us.

For a long time, we have been the other in Australian society. Historically, Australia has tried to engineer us as the kind of other that is either useful (only as little more than slaves and domestics), or

the kind of other that is either hopeless or despicable. They've even rounded up a few of our own people to validate this belief and design policy to inflict punishment upon us. Many of us have always known however, that we are more than this. A different truth has always existed about us and it is our time to assert that truth in a way that will not threaten white Australia, but indeed shall set us all free.

Some Australians think that the solution is to abandon the sense of being 'same' and 'other' so that we can all be 'same' in Australian society. This is not the Australian future to which I think we should aspire. We must be content being other, with no desire to be same as mainstream Australia. We must prefer to be other but only on the grounds that we decide what kind of other we will be. We will triumph as Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander Australians when we assert ourselves in Australia as the strong, smart, black and deadly Australians that we are.

In our triumph it is crucial that other Australians do not feel threatened or divided by this. Whilst it may be a different circumstance to the historical status quo in which we were often powerless, celebrating the notion that we are the only Australians who are connected to the oldest human existence on the planet and the true descendants of the very first Australians.

This has never been about alienating or putting other Australians down. As a people, we have known what it is like to be put down. It is never good to dishonour one's humanity. In this context you have not been our teachers. We have never forgotten the sacrifices of our old people in the past that walked in the long grass to lay a solid platform upon which many of us Indigenous people can stand proudly today.

We must also keep in our minds the times where some of us had to fight. The freedom riots, the Redfern riots, the courage of Lex Wotton and others on Palm Island who risked their lives in the pursuit of justice. Whilst we never want to revisit such times they serve as reminders to all our people that our children still have a journey to make into a stronger, smarter Australian future and it is a journey that they must be armed for. Not with rocks, and sticks and petrol bombs, but with intellectual, psychological and spiritual integrity.

This handover is not an area in which only Indigenous leadership can guide us out of. This indeed is an area in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous leadership must stand side by side, colluding with high expectations, determined to end disadvantage for all Australians. In some ways we are making the right moves at the moment as long as we have the right understanding about what is truly broken here and accordingly what truly needs fixing.

Throughout this lecture I have articulated the Stronger Smarter Philosophy as an approach worth considering, accepting that there are indeed some complexities. To reiterate, these complexities include challenges to white Australia to engage in processes that will enable a much deeper and more valid and positive understanding of Aboriginal identity and of Torres Strait Islander identity. For us, as Indigenous Australians, we must be clear about the type of leadership that is best placed to lead within this very complex arena without being seduced by the trappings of victim status or the trinkets that come with booting the victims. Instead, we must recognise and assert a circumstance in which there is no disadvantage or shame about being an other in Australia as long as it is the type of other that we define.

History will judge whether or not the interest of Twiggy Forrest and his influential mates rallied enough and focussed on the true causes to end disadvantage for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. At some point in the future I would like to think that history acknowledges the place of the Stronger Smarter Philosophy as a significant means with which to stimulate the kind of change required in this regard. Ultimately it doesn't really matter which approach is most significant. What matters most is that Indigenous disadvantage is truly ended in a way that sees white Australians able to stand along side us with our cultural identities intact, respected and understood.

Marcus Garvey once said that to improve our condition, leaders need to inspire hope, dignity and a positive identity. This is the legacy of Koiki Mabo: a leader who inspired hope, dignity and a positive destiny.

## **ITEM INFORMATION**

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