
Greer's latest: it's time to reclaim our Aboriginality

Gabriella Coslovic

Age

6 September 2003

Germaine Greer has a new mission: to get white Australians to embrace their inner Aboriginal. Go ahead, call her barmy, she's ready for it. Gabriella Coslovich reports.

This time last year, the irrepressible Germaine Greer was invoking women to don black burqas in protest against the prospect of Australia joining the war on Iraq.

Predictably, the proposal made headlines; perhaps just as predictably it failed to activate the nation's women, who showed more enthusiasm for actor Kerry Armstrong's later call to rally for peace while wearing bras on the outside.

This year's message brought to you by Greer is guaranteed to cause as much controversy. The outspoken academic is now urging "whitefellas" to embrace their Aboriginality, to look unflinchingly into the mirror and admit and affirm: "I live in an Aboriginal country."

In her utopian essay, Greer asserts that "Australia will be truly self-governing and independent only when it has recognised its inherent and ineradicable Aboriginality".

Reclaiming our Aboriginality and becoming an Aboriginal republic is the path to salvation, the way forward to a more meaningful existence, living in harmony with our fellow Australians and our environment, and an escape from our toxic alignment with "proto-American, secular, acquisitive, hedonistic insouciance".

So Greer argues in typically provocative fashion, favouring emotive effect over logic, in her essay *Whitefella Jump Up, The Shortest Way to Nationhood*, in the latest issue of the journal *Quarterly Essay*, to be launched on Monday with the expatriate professor in attendance.

Anticipating the guffaws of indignation and disbelief, Greer beats her critics to the table, acknowledging she will be denounced as having lost her marbles. On that point at least, she is spot on.

Michael Mansell, former president of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, says Greer's vision could not be more misguided.

"Her theory is so out of this world it's not likely to be given any credibility," Mansell said yesterday. "It's so unreal, it's so remote and its foundation is so flawed. It's like saying the state of Israel is really the state of Palestine. Australia has never embraced Aboriginal society, it has fundamentally rejected it in every form."

It is not the first time that Greer has campaigned for an Aboriginal republic. Two years ago she told a Brisbane conference she would spend the rest of her life trying to turn Australia into an Aboriginal nation.

In her wide-ranging, 20,000word essay, Greer makes her case for the move, arguing that only as an Aboriginal country will Australia “free itself from its spurious identification with the WASP `axis of evil’ “.

She expounds on the white settlers’ mismanagement of the land, which she compares with his early exploitation of Aboriginal women. She criticises whitefellas’ failure to learn from the continent’s ancient caretakers and takes swipes at mining companies, the Anglo-Celtic hegemony that belies the nation’s cultural diversity, and laments the leadership that is our present lot - branding it “the eternal flunkydome”.

Greer also argues that the whitefellas’ legendary egalitarianism, evasiveness, accent and even segregation of the sexes at the barbie or booze-up is the result of contact with the country’s original inhabitants - a theory Mansell dismisses as utter bosh.

”It is nonsense to say Aboriginal society has influenced the development of white society. There is not a shred of evidence to support that notion,” he says.

Philip Ruddock, Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister, however, was a little more receptive to Greer’s theories about the influence of Aborigines on whitefellas. “I think she reads more into it than I suspect is real, but I would agree that in any society the aspects of one culture impact on those of different cultures and people share and benefit from that over time,” he said.

GERMAINE GREER QUOTED

Australia will be truly self-governing and independent only when it has recognised its inherent and ineradicable Aboriginality.

Try saying it in the mirror: “I live in an Aboriginal country.”

Once Australia became an Aboriginal country . . . we would no longer be seen as a puppy running alongside the US and Britain, but as a leader in our own right.

In the past, Australia has truckled to other WASP powers, done their dirty work for them in the hopes of sharing the rewards, and has been snubbed, hard . . .

For 200 years the Aboriginal peoples have been seducing the whitefellas, subtly drawing them into their web of dreams, and though the whitefellas struggle and protest, they are being drawn inexorably closer.

Source: Germaine Greer’s Essay Whitefella Jump Up, The Shortest Way To Nationhood, In Quarterly Essay