

Introduction

Christine Hansen

Centre for Aboriginal History, Australian National University

Kathleen Butler

Wollotuka Institute, University of Newcastle

Identity

Aboriginal identity has been defined in myriad and diverse ways since colonisation. Today, through the bureaucratic concept of Aboriginality, Aboriginal people are generally perceived as having greater self-deterministic possibilities for identity construction. The legislative definition for Aboriginality is that an Aboriginal person:

- is of Aboriginal descent
- identifies as Aboriginal within their community
- is accepted by their community as an Aboriginal person (Gardiner-Garden 2000).

Despite a codified means through which Aboriginal identity can be 'proven', mainstream discourses based on common sense understandings operate to objectify Aboriginal identities, which are scrutinised to maximise difference from the white Australian self. Skin colour, location, language, spirituality and the performance of these on demand to a white audience, be they tourist, judiciary or teacher, all act as markers of authenticity (Brady and Carey 2000). Those who fail to manifest an authentic appearance or performance according to these criteria are treated in mainstream education with varying levels of suspicion, scorn and dismissal. In particular, there are vehement discourses that construct the urban Indigenous population as experiencing less authentic forms of Aboriginality, disassociated from country, having 'lost' culture.

Linked to a philosophy of economic rationalism, these discourses become a means of demonising urban Indigenous people as illegitimate claimants of 'Aboriginal special treatment', diverting funds from 'real Aborigines' who are constructed as the deserving poor. By virtue of their physical location, which supposedly necessitates a cessation

of all facets of Indigenous cultural experience, urban Indigenous disadvantage is positioned firmly as arising from individual pathology. This has the potential for moral and philosophical disadvantage at the micro-level in claims to the processes of self-determination in the formation of identity. More broadly, it has the potential to disempower and marginalise urban Aboriginal people from contemporary political debates such as native title; accurate context-based representations in education; and from equitable participation in Aboriginal consultative bodies. The inclusions in this volume that problematise the supposed disenfranchisement of urban Aboriginal people from 'culture' make an important contribution to the debate on Aboriginal identity.

Yuriko Yamanouchi's work centres on Aboriginal people in south-western Sydney and makes clear that a one-size-fits-all model is inappropriate for exploring the diverse experiences of identity within the region. With a majority of the Aboriginal population having migrated from other areas, identity ranges from a continued kin-based sociality to 'organisation-based socialities' and those seen as 'newly identified'. Yamanouchi introduces the conversations that take place within the community as people attempt to make sense of the complex dynamics of identity that exist within its boundaries. These conversations may render the formal 'proof of Aboriginality' invalid within the social world, where the politics of the everyday can exclude individuals from group membership.

While much of Yamanouchi's fieldwork included in the chapter focuses on the actions and conversations of women, Stephanie Thompson's work in Sydney provides a voice for Aboriginal men and the innovative Tribal Warrior project, which marries the concerns of urban elders, needs for youth programs and the continuity of Aboriginal maritime histories. While acknowledging the drug issues in The Block in Redfern, this chapter alerts the reader to the attempts to redevelop both the land and local lives according to a vision that is still anchored within an Aboriginal cultural life-world.

Also in the identity section is the chapter by Waymamba Gaykamaŋu and Kerin Coulehan, which deals with movement from country to an urban environment. This chapter details the attempts by Yolŋu women to mediate some of the difficulties they face in Darwin and surrounding areas, particularly Palmerston. As in the other chapters, kinship is a factor in urban life, although its centrality to the local experience is more central to wider notions of governance. Thus these chapters share some core factors, while simultaneously highlighting the diversity of the Aboriginal experience.

As African-American scholar Robin Kelley (1994:4) has argued:

We have to step into the complicated maze of experience that renders 'ordinary' folks so extraordinarily multifaceted, diverse, and complicated. Most importantly we need to break away from traditional notions of politics. We must not only redefine what is 'political' but question a lot of common ideas about what are 'authentic' movements and strategies of resistance. By 'authentic' I mean the assumption that only certain organizations and ideologies can truly represent

particular group interests...Such an approach not only disregards diversity and conflict within groups, but it presumes that the only struggles that count take place through institutions.

The identity chapters in this volume speak directly to the challenge of presenting the life-world of 'ordinary' Aboriginal people. In doing so, they challenge the academy and the broader mainstream community to think about Aboriginal identity in new ways, undermining the discourses that presume to determine what constitutes 'real' Aboriginality. These chapters show current forms of the Aboriginal experience in a variety of contexts. Further works like these will only strengthen this field of study, while simultaneously enhancing the lives of many Aboriginal people in their quest for identity and recognition.

History

Critical to understanding urban Aboriginal identities is a consideration of Indigenous history and, particularly, its under-representation, exclusion and misrepresentation in historical texts. Although there is now an increasing focus on Indigenous history, this volume contributes a unique set of chapters that concentrate on the history of urban areas. By doing so, these contributions — from Australia, New Zealand and Canada — provide a rich historical contextualisation that not only illustrate the richness, complexity and variety of urban historical experience, but also informs the chapters focused on urban identity.

It is more than four decades since the anthropologist WEH Stanner reprimanded the nation for its lack of attention to Aboriginal history. In his ground-breaking series of Boyer Lectures in 1968, Stanner famously admonished historians for their collusion in maintaining what he termed the 'great Australian silence' in which Aboriginal people were ignored, forgotten and excluded from mainstream historical narratives. In the 43 years since, significant advances have been made. Today the field of Aboriginal history is burgeoning; from academic journals through to popular television series, many of Australia's most talented creators are turning their attention to telling Aboriginal stories of the past.

With so much interest, you could be mistaken for thinking that the silence was well and truly broken and that the truth of Aboriginal history was at last being acknowledged. Undeniably, the past four decades of scholarship have led to a transformation of the narrative from a largely white settler story to one that at least attempts to deal with the history of interaction between Aboriginal and settler peoples. Yet this transformation struggles to find purchase within the wider culture. The myth that Aboriginal people 'aren't around anymore' or, worse, that 'they're not real Aborigines' continues to play out in public and private settings every day,

nowhere more so than in our towns and cities. For urban people whose history sits in the margins of mainstream interests, the great Australian silence is still deafening.

This important volume of essays goes some way to redressing this situation and in doing so brings into focus several of the critical issues facing the development of Aboriginal history as a discipline into the future. As many of these chapters demonstrate, there is a huge methodological challenge in this field, as there is for the writing of histories of any oppressed peoples. The authors who take on this challenge have each come up against the limitations of the tools traditionally used by historians. Paul Irish and Michael Ingrey, for example, confront the paucity of the archival record in their collaborative work on historical places in the Sydney landscape. This is countered by the fine-grained reading of sources by Neville Green in his study of south-west Western Australia. Similarly, Erin Keenan takes on the language of previous narrators and a lack of nuance in describing the Māori experience of urban migration, while John Maynard and Greg Blyton demand the attention of economic and labour historians in their narratives of politics and the workplace.

What it means to be urban, whether as a colonised traditional owner or a migrant from another place, is an issue that cannot be reduced to a single understanding. The diversity across the work of Peter Read as he re-peoples the historic Aboriginal landscape of Sydney, Bill Edwards as he follows the migration of Anangu to Adelaide and Chris Ross as he travels with the elders deep into the Canadian countryside speaks to the multitude of experiences and the range of approaches that characterise the field of Aboriginal history more widely.

As Peter Read travels with Gordon Briscoe through the disappeared landscape of Briscoe's childhood, from northern Australia to the children's homes of western Sydney, they travel deep into the heart of the issues around 'place' in urban Aboriginal histories. As Briscoe reveals to us the loss of the physical landscape in which his childhood played out, Read moves out into the greater Sydney region, stepping from lost place to lost place, revealing a history that remains un-memorialised. Read is a veteran of revealing previously unseen histories, and Briscoe is a veteran of making them. Together they open up an important discussion about the disassociating of memory from its material remains and the consequences of that dislocation for people whose history is forced into the margins. But Read is not content to leave this observation as a lament. Instead, he reveals the opportunity that new technology offers and the way in which it can jump over mainstream narratives to include voices that would otherwise remain silent. The project that Read unveils offers both new information and an exciting new methodology, using the internet to create what he calls a 'three-dimensional' history that allows for the integration of maps and memories, as well as the web of relationships that these historic places sat within. Tracing remnants of almost forgotten places and histories across the suburbs of Sydney, Read not only offers a fascinatingly re-enlivened landscape but a forum that promises to open up new historical worlds into the future.

Archaeologist Paul Irish and Dharawal man and La Perouse community member Michael Ingrey traverse a similar theme and landscape to that of Read in their painstaking documentation of historical Aboriginal people and places in south-eastern Sydney. This innovative cross-disciplinary research places methodology at its core. Calling on archival, archaeological and oral sources, these scholars carefully piece together the locations of places that hold enormous historical significance for the contemporary community.

Writing from the northern hemisphere, Christopher Gall and Ross Hoffman open a window onto the issues around Aboriginal history that are currently being debated in Canada. In doing so, they offer us a perspective on our own practices and underscore the commonality between experiences within our two nations. Gall documents his journey in the field with the elders of the Tl'azt'en Nation. Seeking to detail the history of their important sites for use by future generations of the community, he travels with the elders back to the places for which they hold custodian responsibilities. As he listens to their recollections, he reflects on the role of oral histories within the wider world of history writing and his own role as receiver of this information. A scholar and an outsider, his determination to offer what he terms 'a cultural inventory' of himself shows his willingness to consider what 'doing history' might mean and the complex ways in which it can be used. Through this reflexive voice he comments on the wider issue of 'who owns history', an issue which resonates across the volume.

Often missing from historical research are members of the migrant Aboriginal population who have relocated to cities from other places. Bill Edwards redresses this omission as he follows the story of Anangu living in Adelaide and their journey from northern South Australia across the past half century. His observations contextualise a widely discussed contemporary issue within a long history, trailing back through the introduction of the assimilation policy, the increase in private car ownership, the causes of family breakdown, the location of medical services, the increase in welfare dependency and local employment opportunities in remote locations. The issues faced by this group once they reach the city are those faced by many migrants; cultural misunderstandings, difficulty in accessing services and fractured social structures. As Edwards points out, there is intense focus on remote communities, particularly in light of the 'Intervention', yet little consideration is given to providing for this group of migrant city dwellers once they leave their remote homes, a worrying oversight given that it is a growing population. Edwards' contribution sets the scene for a deeper consideration of the needs of urban Anangu and of urban migrant groups more broadly.

The theme of connections between rural and urban spaces plays out in the highly politicised milieu of Australian Aboriginal and African-American revolt in John Maynard's contribution to the volume. Here the focus is on the effectiveness of political movements founded in urban centres with a support base in rural

communities. This transnational study looks at the links between Marcus Garvey, the most effective black activist of his generation in the United States, and Fred Maynard, the founder of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association. These two great leaders founded their organisations in the metropolitan centres of political power in the 1920s, yet travelled widely in rural locations to generate grassroots support. It was this combination of rural and metropolitan activism that was central to their success, drawing on the established links between people living in cities and their networks 'back home'. By moving between these two case studies, Maynard provides us with a much needed historical insight into the sophistication of both political activism and international co-operation in Aboriginal organisations in the early twentieth century. In doing so, he reaches into an overlooked strand of labour and political history, particularly the role of the workplace in the transference of knowledge.

The theme of labour and economic migration is picked up by Greg Blyton in his work on families in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie districts. Blyton follows the twin strands of railway workers and families who settled in shanty towns.

As historians have found in mission history in Australia, Erin Keenan finds in New Zealand/Aotearoa: that new urban spaces were places where change occurred but they were also spaces where continuities were emphasised. By using oral histories to review aspects of recent history, she revisits discussions on urban social lives as sites of Māori adaptation and change, as well as cultural affirmation and continuity. She challenges the language of historians in their discussions about urban migration as she proposes that, despite the changes that have defined histories, continuities remained the defining factors in Māori urban lives. Māori understandings of the meanings of urbanisation suggest that a more holistic approach to urban migration research is necessary for oral history research.

Neville Green's chapter reviews the available historical sources that provide information about the Indigenous population of the Perth metropolitan district from 1829 to 2001. He examines the major shifts in population through a range of published data and archival sources and considers contributing factors such as violence, disease and migration. Green utilises a range of data, including name census reports in conjunction with research on biographical dictionaries. His chapter shows what can be gleaned from fine-grained analysis of historical sources, but also the limits of the information they provide.

The history chapters in this volume are proof that Indigenous history is not lost, but the painstaking work of writing it back into the record takes a huge commitment to historical truth. The identity chapters show how urban life continues today and into the future. Combined, the chapters in this volume allow a deeper understanding and

awareness of an urban Indigenous history and experience that has been significantly under-represented in scholarly publication to date.

References

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