



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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take, then asks what do they give back in return? It is disappointing that in this book she hasn't taken the opportunity to acknowledge the numerous deep, long-term relationships founded on trust and goodness between individuals from both cultures. The author describes the mutual obligations for accountability within a Western framework, but few conversations with Aboriginal people and their views are noted. There are instances noted by the author where Aborigines leave paid employment to pursue their lives. She seems unable to continue the conversation as to why. It is easy to assume that Aborigines are passive partners of Western cultural dominance. This need not be so. Aborigines have strong voices and motivations, with cultural responsibilities, and inevitable accountabilities under local Aboriginal social codes.

While Jordan openly acknowledges *Balanda* as a "subjective, personal account", she has placed on public record her thoughts, albeit in the form of a diary, on one of the hottest issues currently facing Australia. As such she must be challenged for the inconsistencies, oversights and shortcomings within the book (a challenge I feel she would welcome). She glosses over funerals with little reference to conversations with resident Aborigines as to why the funerals continue for a week. Or to her observations recording the long, protracted hours of singing and dancing, or to the emotional commitment or the cultural integrity of the ceremony. She is patronisingly amazed with Alice's Aboriginal English, but not how little vernacular language she has after many years in Maningrida, nor does she connect this the wider loss of vernacular language.

The reader needs to be alert to superficial explanations of deeper issues. Maningrida is one of only two townships in Arnhem where alcohol is available. Jordan's explanation that this system was designed to sate the "Aboriginal" appetite for alcohol is superficial and needs further investigation. None of the other townships have high numbers of residents in Darwin or elsewhere merely for alcohol. Indigenous research conducted by the *Yalu Marngithinyaraw* from the region documents that the majority of "long-grassers" are in Darwin for reasons unrelated to alcohol.

Balanda touches on the dysfunction of the larger Arnhem towns such as Maningrida, where card games and drugs are mediums for maintaining a social life. The mention that attempted suicides occur every "barge weekend" will draw horror from the reader, while at the same time suggesting this fortnightly situation indicates "hopelessness and despair". Mary Ellen acknowledges that her position changes, she has no solutions, though it would seem hope is ever present.

Fortunately the author took initiatives to visit homelands (outstations) during her time at Maningrida, there she noticed it was "very different to life in town". Here there were Western indicators of health and beauty, gardens, regular hunting, and

"how much healthier the people looked than the town people". The ease of "being" with people when "on Land" as opposed to the invisible barriers that keep black and white apart in the township. Unfortunately, the author's inner dialogue is silent, and she does not probe this most important issue.

The book is a year long journey written in a language that flows from Mary Ellen Jordan's pen. Every page brings us to a new situation and a new experience, conveyed with frankness and honesty. It is also a superficial journey lacking in insight and depth. This book will be interesting reading for those planning to work in the Top End of the Northern Territory for the first time, and highly recommended for those interested in glimpsing into everyday life in the larger Arnhem Land townships through one person's eyes. But we must wait for another book that lets us see Maningrida through the eyes of its Aboriginal owners and residents.

WHITENING RACE: ESSAYS IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CRITICISM

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Ed.)

Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2004, xiv+303pp,
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Gillian Cowlshaw tells a story about sitting in a coffee shop in the main street of Bourke when a fight broke out between some Aboriginal women in front of the café. The white waitress was embarrassed by the public melee and turned to Cowlshaw to respond in an exasperated tone, "they're at it again" (p. 74). While she viewed the street performance as an attempt to scandalise those "uptight, moralistic and judging whites" who were looking on, Cowlshaw was drawn by the waitress' response, but only to feel a sense of unease about her own superiority to the waitress' contempt for what was happening in front of them. Cowlshaw describes how she had to struggle with her own judgement of the waitress who was in turn judging Aboriginal women swearing and shouting, and through this story she raises questions about who is in a position to judge when one glance always sees another. This edited book suggests that white Australians have historically assumed that they have the power to look back in comfort, and judge. The white gaze has existed to maintain an unequal power relation in this country, and this series of critical essays on the "normative and dominant nature of whiteness" attempts to "address

this imbalance by revealing the many ways in which whiteness is socially and discursively constructed" (Preface).

Aileen Moreton-Robinson traces the discursive construction of whiteness through the production of knowledge. Being white continues to be constituted in education, health, social work, in the creative arts and in the media as the standard for others to attain. Institutions throughout Australia remain white in thought and organisation. In a return to Hage (*White nation*), multiculturalism is the great white fantasy. Elder, Ellis and Pratt in their chapter on "Whiteness in constructions of nationhood" observe that part of this fantasy involves a feeling among white people that they are becoming more inclusive and more tolerant, and this is certainly my experience in teaching teachers in an essentially white, middle class context. Most students feel that things are on the turn, that people from different cultural backgrounds get on better now than they ever have, and that they themselves are more tolerant than their parents. I thought the same at the age of 20, but perhaps things never change in education where students and teachers alike continue to be afflicted by the spectre of enlightenment.

Elder, Ellis and Pratt analyse the emergence of another way of controlling the white nation-space, and certainly many people continue to vote for the man who is currently managing this in Australia. In an examination of Australian nationhood, Elder, Ellis and Pratt illustrate how the Australian government is consciously involved in the governance of the white nation-space, and the management of non-white Australians, just as they have been over the past 200 years through the various policies of assimilation and integration. They stop short of suggesting that education will help whites to acknowledge their own power and to relinquish it. They note the irony (and the disillusioning reality) that the "Australian public" are outraged that refugees are arriving here without permission. Not only do Australians continue to support the Prime Minister's policies on immigration, Sonia Tascon reveals how the large majority still live in fear that their backyards are under threat from Aboriginal land claims. And this is where things become sticky for the editor of this book, as the boundaries between *white* and *non-white*, imposed by the contributors, become less distinct in the context of this demonstrated support for government policies, and in particular, Aboriginal support for Pauline Hanson.

Does this book do any more than name white power and privilege? Sonia Tascon takes up this question in the final chapter to claim that the "answers lie in the deconstruction of knowledge and power, and the acknowledgment of alternative epistemologies" (p. 250). Perhaps universities could make a start here. My teacher education students would opt for a cognitive solution, thinking blissfully that if they

teach the students well, then they too will share the same fantasy as their teacher. And for academics, Cowlshaw asks "in what ways can differently raced scholars make common cause in their intellectual work" (p. 62)? She adds that, at university there is still considerable difference between talking *about* and talking *with* Indigenous people. And this is true in disciplines like education where most teachers have nothing to do with Indigenous people even though they are required to teach about Indigenous Australia. Susan Young draws on Giroux to take the position that contemporary social work education needs to adopt a critically reflexive position where students focus on their own personal values, beliefs and experiences. But she is also sceptical of the enlightenment discourse that positions people in the West as being able to think their way out of problems. While she returns to the need to develop "genuine human relationships" and "engagement in dialogue", she does not show us how these might be negotiated outside a desire that people will become more ethical citizens in their daily lives. In the opening chapter, Ravenscroft makes the point that we will find our whiteness manifested in our representations of our others; Hage observes that this is where we will also discover our links with others.

The transcendental signified that unifies the book is Ghassan Hage's *White nation*. A number of chapters refer to Hage's psychoanalytical interpretation of the dominant white Australian culture as the one that affirms its own value as the object of the others' desire. Perhaps this critical observation from Hage parallels a remark that my friend recently made to her spouse: "sometimes I feel you could do without me". Foord posits that "Indigeness has always been a function of white identity in white Australian history" (p. 146). These essays suggest that relationships, power and identity are unconsciously negotiated and shared, albeit unequally, while Wadham claims that white people must get their own home (racialised self) in order if reconciliation is to be achieved. They can only do this through cross-cultural dialogue, rather than with people like themselves, but then they have to ask the very people they dominate to educate them. One of the great questions explored in post-Freudian psychoanalysis is how we position ourselves in relation to others through language.

Others have asked: How can we speak and write in ways that will bring us together rather than separate us? This question constitutes one of the great legacies of the poststructuralists insofar as they have warned us about the dangers of a metaphorical relation and all the competition that it can produce. For example, we witnessed one of the great theoretical battles between Foucault and Derrida, the latter's rather depressing adherence to metaphorical relations as opposed to Foucault's imaginary desire for metonymy. This is again played out in Foord's chapter on "Frontier theory" where she discusses the two distinguishing features of

language: displacement and condensation. Jane Haggis in her chapter on the politics of whiteness highlights the problems of *theorising togetherness* as we worry endlessly over difference. Cowlshaw is interested in how we talk about history without being offensive, a question which, in my experience, has often been asked by Indigenous students in anthropology. This book then, is about how we can develop links with others to address the unequal power relations that have historically divided us.

In conclusion, I would like to return to where I started, namely with the story about the girl in the café at Bourke. English and the way it is used in many Australian contexts demands that its speakers interpret and judge, and this situation is difficult to avoid outside narrativisations. Martin Nakata has highlighted how Indigenous academics and students have had to negotiate their way through an overdetermined white academy. Something similar is at work in our daily relationships where our slights and barbs can position the ego in a chain of endless substitutions and judgements. This is Cowlshaw's cross to bear with the girl in the coffee shop.

A MAN OF ALL TRIBES: THE LIFE OF ALICK JACKOMOS

Richard Broome & Corinne Manning

Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006, xiv+298pp, ISBN 0855755016

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The last time I saw Alick Jackomos was at Fitzroy Stars Gymnasium. Alick was then in his seventies and had finished a workout and was freshly showered, neatly dressed, and radiating goodwill; at ease with himself and open to other people. A modest man who never pulled rank as he would have been entitled to do, he wore the weight of his great experience easily.

Richard Broome and Corinne Manning's, appropriately titled, *A Man of All Tribes*, is a magnificent tribute to Alick Jackomos that fills in the detail for the many who knew the man but not the full extent of his varied life, or the circumstances and experiences that played a role in forming him. We learn that there were parts of his rich personality that were unknowable; possibly even to those who were closest to him, an explanation for how he was able to spend time with so many people without being exhausted by them. Broome and Manning refer to the subject of their biography as Alick throughout their narrative, and I'll continue this practice so obviously in keeping with the character of Alick Jackomos.

Issues of race and ethnicity and identity were central to Alick's childhood. His parents were Greek migrants from Castellorizo, an island which is part of the Dodecanese chain in the Aegean Sea. There was a confidence and intelligence about the manner in which his parents settled into Australian life. During Alick's early boyhood the family was living crammed into a few rooms in a shared terrace house but life was value-driven and oriented toward aspirations and principles. For instance, the family ran the cannily named Magpie Fish, a fish and chip shop situated in football-mad Collingwood and evoking one of Australia's iconic birds. As an example of the family's openness to Australian culture the Jackomos family listened to radio broadcasts of *Dad and Dave*, and test matches, and Alick would sneak in to Collingwood Football Ground to support his favourite team.

The dark side of this childhood was young Alick's experience of Anglo-Australian racism and race-hate as a boy. Once, waiting to enter a football ground, a racist called him a "little dago" and crushed a hot pie into his face which burned Alick so badly he required medical treatment. Broome and Manning relate other instances of race-hate experienced by Alick and one can't help reflecting on contemporary Australia when reading of these instances. Have we, as a society, progressed as much we might have? Probably not. One is reminded of the situation of more recent migrant groups negotiating nostalgic attraction for an originary culture with the challenges and attractions of contemporary Australian culture and society, all tempered by the experience, or threat, of Anglo-Australian racism.

It seems from Broome and Manning's biography that Alick's ethical philosophy was formed during the Great Depression of the 1930s. It goes without saying that times were hard but, at least in the working class suburbs, there was a culture of mutual support that impacted on Alick as a boy. Alick's early contact and growing friendships with Aboriginal youths at the Exhibition Police Boys Club is addressed by Broome and Manning, including his two week "disappearance" when he was 14. Without his parent's knowledge he went to Lake Tyers reserve where he stayed with the Moffatt family. Yet the depth of Alick's connection with the Aboriginal community remains something of a riddle. Perhaps as a boy proudly Australian and interested in Anglo-Australians, and Australia, he sensed in Koories a more benign way of being Australian, or even a more profound connection with country. Or perhaps, in light of the ethical frameworks he was developing at the time, Aboriginal people may have been the best exemplars of his core values of accepting other people, and caring and sharing (values he was later to find among the show people when he joined the boxing tents). In some other cultures they would say simply of Alick, "he had an Aboriginal soul".

Serving in the army with the 2/14th Battalion during World War II provided Alick with an opportunity to