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# SHARING SPACES: INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS RESPONSES TO STORY, COUNTRY AND RIGHTS

Gus Worby & Lester-Irabinna Rigney (Eds.)  
Australian Public Intellectual Network, Perth, 2005,  
xxii + 488pp, ISBN 1 920845 20 8

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*Sharing Spaces* provides comments and discussions that are relevant for the disciplines of Education, Law and Social Sciences in academic study. It is a must-read for students whose concerns are for history and race relations in Australia. The book is a compilation of authors from Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage with recognition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander epistemology and ontological worldviews and knowing. It is a commentary of a shared reality where dominant discourses have at times subverted the voices of actual practices in the colonisation of Aboriginal landscapes. The essays and conversations provides that post-colonisation is a myth and the colonisation practices are historically located in a timeline that continues today where political and bureaucratic speak and policy marginalise Aboriginal society to the fringes of Australian society. The central position is that the dominant societal ideology determines what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social constructs. This negates Aboriginal views of country that are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander holistic well-being.

*Sharing Spaces* is an engagement of discourses and bipartisan dialogues. The text provides examples of the polarisation of Australian views with regards to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, values and views. It provides a shared understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders ways of knowing, being and experiences. The essays, conversations and positions of the contributors deal with the tensions of recognition of rights, justice and morality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the broader notions of Australian egalitarianism and a fair go for all.

The narratives provide voice to a sense of shared histories, spaces and experiences, where the theoretical frameworks position country at the very heart of the community voice. The duality of

nationhood and identity is articulated as an underlying tension and rises from the text in common harmony. The juxtaposition of values of place and ownership of country are positioned in the social, and skirts concepts of difference where ideas of country unite within the practices of sharing spaces and histories. The visualisation of horizons and the spatial shape create awareness in locating the "Aboriginal" on a map where it is isolated and controlled. Further, consideration of the ideological significance of fencing Aboriginal lands adds to feelings of neglect and lawlessness.

The feeling of common histories and shared realities is constructed through three parts where essays interrogate by discussions that speak and reflect the contributions made by voices of authority on subject matter. This is translated cleverly by shared speak that illuminates current and historical battles over righteous ideologies and debates. The three touchstones are a shared conversation of stories, country and rights set within telling the other side of the story of the colonisation of Aboriginal... stralia, where the human is at the centre.

The authors move positively from outdated rhetoric in addressing communal issues of race and identities. The essays and conversations track human figures through the colonial landscape to plot an understanding of the economical and environmental existence of denial of the Aboriginal. The conversation provides an interpretation to the cultural indifferences that spread over the Aboriginal country, sweeping and washing away the pre-existing order and articulates the accommodation made by the human characters to this forced imposition. The conversations challenge the vagueness in scholarly imagination where the complex human social order reconstruct the scene of human reaction to the ongoing debate for maintenance of social activities and survival. Within an indifferent white-dominated society the play of humanity in coping with a new social order is exposed, where the spiritual, language retention and cultural complexities are maintained.

From this point of view the essays and conversations describe accounts and make connection to historical data of time, people and places. The text developed in collaboration with Aboriginal oral histories is a print-based resource that reconceptualises the Aboriginal presence. The use of oral tradition mentally locates Aboriginal society within the Australian landscape and historiography. The telling of oral tradition and the conversations are instrumental in creating the identity of the themes and provides a personality to the discourses. The essays and conversations engage in the Aboriginal reality and Aboriginal life-world and are viewed through a sense of space, where both black and white have interests and competing demands. The contributions from the authors recognise the fusion of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal to transform realities;

there is a sense of historical understanding that the horizon has been influenced by Aboriginal demands to be heard.

The essays provide many examples of the debates and complexities of issues such as sovereignty, the lack of sharing political domains, or the sharing of resources and wealth. It engages in an account of the denial to a formal negotiated settlement for the invasion and subversion of Aboriginal wealth. Further, the essays consider the refusal to negotiate an Aboriginal voice in policy and legal issues or the consideration of a truly representative space for Aboriginal cultural memory, which does not have strings attached.

Finally the many discourses and voices of the text tell of events, policies and practices that speak of the before, the then, the now and the future; for example, the neglect and death of traditional Australian languages and the usurpation of the mono-Anglo. The conversations are a cultural narrative about collective memory. The process of speak and histories is more than collecting and recreating the histories of the new Australians and their racial attitudes to the first Australians. The many voices give a human value to the stories and histories – it provides a richness to the clash of cultures. The contribution and success of merging Aboriginal oral histories and knowledges into academic scholarship that deals with a diversity of experiences is a testament to the spirit of place which is reflected in this book.

## SOVEREIGN SUBJECTS: INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY MATTERS

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Ed.)

Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest, 2007, xvi+240pp, ISBN 978 1 74114 724 7

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This is an excellent publication and will become a much sought-after addition to any library or academic institution. Aileen Morton-Robinson must be congratulated for pulling together this powerful educational resource and it will undoubtedly become the standard on this important topic.

Significantly, all the contributors are Indigenous and this grounds the publication in an Indigenous framework of knowing. The contributors are from diverse fields and backgrounds and offer insight, expertise and knowledge rarely seen in one volume.

The end result they unequivocally deliver is that Indigenous sovereignty of this continent has never been ceded and this most striking and fundamental message ripples through the undercurrents of all these essays.

Discussions of Indigenous sovereignty and a formal treaty have been tabled for over 30 years but successive Federal governments have found the issue far too hard to resolve or ratify. This seems rather strange as during that time Indigenous issues have gained widespread publicity and support, as evidenced by the 1967 Referendum and the Corroborree 2000 walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Sadly, we have not been blessed with a national leader with the courage and conviction to set the country on a path where the injustices of the past and inequalities of the present could be both recognised and dealt with.

The book covers such important areas as law, policy, globalisation, writing, history and health, clearly demonstrating the depth of Indigenous intellectual thought and talent that is currently delivering an Indigenous perspective.

There have been incredible changes across the past 40 years, but the last decade has seen a whittling away at all of these gains and in some instances, particularly with the 'history wars' debate, one at times feels as if the country has been dragged back to the 1950s where an Aboriginal presence in both history and society was barely visible. As a historian myself I was greatly interested in that aspect of this collection.

Tony Birch in his essay has no hesitation in labelling the history war as a "phony war, a brand name and logo to sell books and promote insecure egos" (p.108). This white colonial battlefield and turf war over the past has been waged as a "cultural and ideological war which, in the aftermath of Mabo and subsequent native title legislation, created an ideological panic amongst those in Australia who would prefer that Indigenous people remain in a place of reliance" (p. 108).

Gary Foley delivers an overview of the Aboriginal political fight from a standpoint and insider's view that only he could deliver. It is insightful, enlightening and delivers a word of warning that no political party has truly earned Indigenous trust.

Wendy Brady articulates that the Indigenous fight for sovereignty is an ongoing campaign and is tightly grounded in our background and connection to place and identity. It is the connection to traditional country through family and kinship ties that strengthens our resolve against the impact of colonisation. The full weight of living within a country where we are the marginalised minority and exposed continuously to both the difficulties and danger "of living life simultaneously on two levels: one exists within a white nation that considers itself sovereign, while the other functions as an Indigenous sovereign being" (p.10) is an ongoing dilemma.