‘We don’t leave our identities at the city limits’: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban localities

Bronwyn Fredericks
Office of Indigenous Engagement, Central Queensland University Australia

Abstract: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in cities and towns are often thought of as ‘less Indigenous’ than those who live ‘in the bush’, as though they are ‘fake’ Aboriginal people — while ‘real’ Aboriginal people live ‘on communities’ and ‘real’ Torres Strait Islander people live ‘on islands’. Yet more than 70 percent of Australia’s Indigenous peoples live in urban locations (ABS 2007), and urban living is just as much part of a reality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as living in remote discrete communities. This paper examines the contradictions and struggles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience when living in urban environments. It looks at the symbols of place and space on display in the Australian cities of Melbourne and Brisbane to demonstrate how prevailing social, political and economic values are displayed. Symbols of place and space are never neutral, and this paper argues that they can either marginalise and oppress urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or demonstrate that they are included and engaged.*

Do ‘real’ Aboriginal people live in cities?

We don’t leave our identities at a petrol station, bus stop, jetty or airport when we enter the city limits. When we live in a city or town, we don’t become any less or any more Indigenous. Some of us even belong to the Country where huge cityscapes and towns have been built. Yet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban areas are sometimes perceived as ‘fake’, ‘not real’ and ‘not authentic’ because ‘real’ Aboriginal people belong ‘out back’, ‘on communities’ and in the ‘bush’, and ‘real’ Torres Strait Islanders really live ‘on islands’ in the Torres Strait.

The lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in urban localities need to be understood within the context of the changing way of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More than 70 percent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now live in urban areas (ABS 2007). Living in urban locales is as much a part of reality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as living in remote discrete communities. Despite this, limited research highlights the experiences of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations living in urban areas and the issues that impact on Indigenous achievements in education, health status, housing needs, rates of incarceration and the struggle for cultural recognition. There is, however, a growing body of work in health and housing and other specialised areas.

This paper highlights the contradictions and struggles that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face within urban environments. It examines issues of place and space, and the political and economic assumptions that are embedded within them. Through a lens that recognises that place and space can never be neutral, this paper argues that symbols of place and space can either marginalise and oppress urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or demonstrate that they are included and engaged.

There seems to be a widespread myth that, when Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people enter cities or regional centres, we somehow become less Indigenous. It is almost as if we have to leave our identities at the city limits, jetty or airport. But when Indigenous people live in a city or town, we don't become any less or any more Indigenous. Some Aboriginal people are descendants of the Aboriginal people who occupied the geographic localities where urban centres have now been built. These Aboriginal people, like their ancestors, belong to the Country on which urban centres have grown. For example, my family and many others lived and still live in the geographic areas where cities now stand. The blood of my ancestors still flows through me, as it does through other Aboriginal people, and we breathe, walk and live on Country that is occupied by cities.

As part of a study undertaken in Brisbane to examine the issues of urban Indigenous populations, participants were questioned about urban Indigenous identity and Aboriginality (Ivanitz 1999). Comments from respondents included that 'some of them don't even look Aboriginal' and 'all the blackfellas have been assimilated and people who live in a metropolitan area are not real Aborigines — they are no different than the average whitefella' (Ivanitz 1999). Some members of the dominant society discount the claims of fair-skinned Aboriginal people — those who are darker in skin colour are regarded as being 'more Aboriginal' and closer to what is considered 'traditional'. This has been played out with vigour in newspapers, online columns and Twitter in recent years. Within the dominant culture, there is a lack of understanding that Aboriginal people can be light skinned and blond, and dark skinned and black haired. We don't have to go far for examples; one only need mention the Andrew Bolt case (Bolt 2009; Greenfield 2011) or Anita Heiss and her recent book *Am I Black Enough for You?* (Overington 2012) and people form a picture. Aboriginal people have also added to the debate about identity coupled with issues of class, disadvantage and need; for example, Anthony Dillon (2012), Marcia Langton (2012), Nicole Watson (2012) and others. I am not going down the path of need here. What all of the recent discussions on identity reveal is that so many people have an opinion on Aboriginal identity and identities and that some are more informed than others. What is of concern is that in some of the discussions there appears to be no understanding that there can be a continuum of Aboriginal culture. It's as if the past can't exist with the present and multiple identities can't exist with each other. Aboriginal people who live in urban areas may be perceived as having no culture at all, because they don't fit the inaccurate stereotypes of what are said to be Aboriginal 'traditional' or 'tribal' ways of being hunters and gatherers or because they are successful in the ways governments want Aboriginal people to be (Moreton-Robinson cited in Fanning 2012). Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, in reference to a possible candidate as being a 'traditional Australian Aboriginal' and to Indigenous Member of Parliament in the House of Representatives Ken Wyatt as an 'urban Aboriginal', is an example of this divide. This can occur even when urban-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a presence through large organisations and institutions, public artworks on display, and signage and symbolism within cities.

Even within the context of comments that question urban Indigenous identity, Aboriginal people living in urban areas are still asked to 'give a Welcome' or an 'Acknowledgment to Country' in cities and in other urban areas. We are also asked 'whether we know, or could we organise, a group to do traditional dancing or play the didgeridoo, or whether we can get an artist to paint a mural or display some art?' (Fredericks 2004). Other than the observation of strict cultural protocol in terms of a Welcome to Country, Acknowledgment to Country or recognition of Country, we are

often locked into a cultural paradigm that is a romanticised notion of the precolonial past. This continued focus on the 'traditional' cultural aspects and romanticism ignores the continuous presence of Aboriginal people within the cities of Australia. Moreover, it ignores the interweaving of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within a contemporary post-invasion historical context. In effect, it conceals the ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people use and see places and spaces in everyday urban life.

Understanding Country

In the context of this discussion, Country means a place of origin in spiritual, cultural and literal terms. It refers to a specific clan, tribal group or nation of Aboriginal people and encompasses all the knowledge, cultural norms, values, stories and resources within that particular area — that particular Indigenous place. Sally Morgan (2008) and Joan Winch (2008) both identify the notion of Country as central to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and history, and it contributes to overall health and wellbeing. Within Country, women and men both have a central role, in terms of ownership, care and rights. Ambelin Kwaymullina, who belongs to the Palkyu people from the Pilbara, explains that 'we are [a] living, breathing, thinking physical manifestation of our land — a thread in the pattern of creation' (Kwaymullina 2008:9).

If Aboriginal people live in the Country of other Aboriginal people, it does not mean necessarily that their connections to Country are lost, or that the significance of Country is no longer present. This is evident in the words of Irene Watson (2008:99) when she declares, 'I still belong to country. It is bred into me and it is an old idea and one that still lives'. Bob Morgan (2008:204) states that 'my culture and worldview are centred in Gumilaroi land and its people. This is who I am and will always be. I am my country.' Sally Morgan (2008:263) describes how 'our country is alive, and no matter where we go, our country never leaves us'. This connection to Country exists irrespective of whether Bob Morgan, Sally Morgan, Irene Watson and other Aboriginal people are living on their Country or not.

This is not necessarily the case for all Aboriginal people and certainly may not be the case for families who have not lived on Country for generations or for those who have disengaged or been dispossessed from their cultures or for people who have been removed through policy or the state. There are also Aboriginal people whose families have lived in an Aboriginal settlement (mission/reserve) and in urban areas and who have Country somewhere different to where they live now. In some forums it can be common for Aboriginal people to articulate their connection to Country and then their historical connection to a former reserve community, and then talk about home being a big city or regional centre. For other Aboriginal people it can be difficult naming who they belong to and their connections to Country. As a Director of Link-Up Queensland, an organisation that assists Aboriginal people to reconnect to their families and communities, I am well aware that for some Aboriginal people it can take years and for others it may never happen.

The fact that a large number of Aboriginal people now live in urban, peri-urban and regional centres means that many Aboriginal Australians now pass through, dwell and live within the Country belonging to other Aboriginal Australians (Fredericks 2007, 2008a). While we as Indigenous people might live within the Country of another Indigenous nation, we are still in Indigenous places (Fredericks 2008a; Moreton-Robinson 2003). From an Aboriginal perspective, non-Indigenous people, too, are also always on the Country of Aboriginal people and hence always within Indigenous places (Due 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2003 — regardless of where that is or when that is within Australia. This is the case irrespective of one's personal connections.

Non-Indigenous Australians may call Australia 'home', but their demonstrated epistemological understandings of what constitutes 'home' are still bound within a place that is located outside of Australia (Moreton-Robinson 2007). I am not arguing that non-Indigenous Australians long for an identity that is held elsewhere or for a homeland that is somewhere else (Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Instead, I argue that the demonstrated epistemological framework of what constitutes 'home' and is Australian has its roots in land, history and culture of some place elsewhere.

Understanding connections to place

Moreton-Robinson (2007) articulates how Indigenous peoples' sense of place, home and belonging is configured differently to that of migrants in terms of knowing. She asserts that 'there is no other homeland that provides a point of origin, or place for multiple identities. Instead our rendering of place, home and country through our ontological relation to country is the basis for our ownership' (Moreton-Robinson 2007:37). Sally Morgan (2008:263) describes this in part when she explains that:

> When we experience that deep longing inside ourselves, then we know our country is calling us back. It is time to go home, even if only for a short while. This is because my country is far more than what can be seen with physical eyes. Our country is the home of our ancestral spirits, the place of our belonging. The core of our humanity.

The realities of Indigenous place and Indigenous ownership of place remain unchanged, even though the processes of colonisation in Australia have dispossessed and displaced Indigenous peoples and may have altered Indigenous connections, access and control within and of place. In urban localities, as in other geographic localities, Aboriginal peoples still have Indigenous belonging and Indigenous ownership of place. This exists regardless of whether multi-storey buildings, freeways, sports grounds, houses and places of worship have been built within that geographic locality. It exists regardless of whether individual Australians claim ownership. Non-Indigenous territorialisation of sites and land holdings is only possible through the dispossession and de-territorialising of Aboriginal people from that land.

Within urban localities, a multiple of realities and connections to place can exist. This includes the Aboriginal ownership of place and the non-Indigenous attachment and connections to place — which may be varied depending on that urban centre's history and economic situation. Sommerville (2010) contends there are a mixture of complex political realities of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships in place and that some places offer multiple and contested stories of experiences of that place. Sometimes, the experiences of place contain deeply held beliefs and emotions, and people may display emotional behaviour in relation to place — such as affection, nostalgia or dislike (Memmott and Long 2002). Furthermore, as emotions and behaviours develop, they may also then be 'maintained by groups of people having collective experiences at those parts of the environment and reinforced through feedback from ongoing experiences at such places' (Memmott and Long 2002:40). Through this process, it is possible that places can enact the politics of inclusion and allow for multiple identities and marginalised groups (Sibley 1995) or enact 'a place-based politics which is reactionary, exclusionary and blatantly supportive of dominant regimes' (Oakes 1997:526). That is, places can enact feelings of welcome, belonging and inclusion, or feelings of being unwelcome and excluded.

De Certeau's (1984) book *The Practice of Everyday Life* constructs the notion of belonging as a sentiment that develops over time through everyday activities. For De Certeau, simple everyday activities are part of the process of appropriation and territorialisation. He suggests that, over time, belonging and attachment are established and built on memory, knowledge and the experiences of everyday activities. This is seen in the experiences of non-Indigenous Australians, who have developed attachment and belonging to places based on the dispossession of Aboriginal people and on their everyday activities over the past 200 years. During this time, non-Indigenous people have marked their appropriation and territorialisation with signs, symbols, representations and images. In marking their attachment, they also define how they position Indigenous people — both by our presence and our absence.

The concepts of place and space are closely related. Sommerville (2010:327) argues that place and space are so 'deeply implicated in one another it is difficult to consider one without the other'. Mills (2006) explains that 'space is a question of relations: perceptions of and actual relations between the individual, the group, institutions and architecture, with forces being perceived as restricting or enabling movement or access'. Gupta and Ferguson (1992:8) state that 'an identity of a place emerges by the intersection of its specific involvement in a system of hierarchically organised spaces with its cultural construction

as a community or locality'. Gregory and Urry (1985:3) add to this by explaining that spatial structure 'is now seen not merely as an arena in which social life unfolds, but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced'. It combines physical and social relations, along with patterns and processes (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1984; Soja 1989). Spaces act as almost social texts, which convey signs, symbols and messages of belonging and exclusion, and produce and reproduce power relations within society. This is also highlighted in the work of Pat Dudgeon and John Fielder (2006). Spaces, according to Lefebvre (1991), are social products created from a mix of legal, political, economic and social practices and structures. They are, as suggested by Foucault (1980:149), sites of social struggle and contested realms of identity. In this way, places are in mutually constitutive relationships with spaces.

Spaces and places need to be understood as never being neutral or natural. They are extremely political. They reflect expressions of cultural memory, belonging, identity and citizenship (Wallwork and Dixon 2004), and 'us' and 'them' dynamics exist within public and private spaces. In addition, they can actively operate to make Aboriginal people 'non-locals' or 'strangers' on Aboriginal land. This can include those Aboriginal people from other places (other Country) and also Aboriginal people who are from the places where they may be made to feel like 'non-locals' (the Land, Country of the place). This is discussed by Carey (2004, 2008), who explores the interconnections between whiteness, white sovereignty and Indigenous sovereignty. Moreton-Robinson (2007) additionally discusses there interconnections, drawing on examples of place.

Symbols of place and space in Melbourne and Brisbane

The streets and laneways of a city can be explored using the work of De Certeau (1984) and others who write in the fields of social geography, spatiality and urban design. This exploration can lead to multiple ways of understanding the cultural meanings of place and space that are inscribed with an array of politics. For example, streetscapes, laneways, names of buildings and urban design itself can often reflect the symbolic place that each individual holds within that suburb and within that city. The physical sites and appearances of streets and laneways can act as social texts that convey messages of belonging and welcome or exclusion and domination, and produce and reproduce power and control relations. Using the Australian cities of greater Melbourne and Brisbane as examples, I demonstrate how an array of prevailing social, political and economic values of place and space exist. Memory, representations, symbols, signs and images have a role in showcasing who is of value and who is not.

Within cities, Aboriginal people are active recognisers of places that, through their symbols, identify Aboriginal people by our presence, or identify us by our absence. That is, Aboriginal people don't just 'make' place; places and spaces 'make' Aboriginal people (Fredericks 2009). Within Melbourne and Brisbane, for example, there are many signs, symbols and representations that assert an emphasis on British and European settler history — including the claiming and clearing of Aboriginal land and attempts to erase Aboriginal sovereignty. These signs act as markers and borders of the colonial frontier and centre white power within selective suburbs and streets, buildings, parks and other localities. In this way, colonial representations, power, and social and political meanings are inscribed and conveyed to Aboriginal people and about Aboriginal people without a word even being said.

The work of Edmonds (2010) undertaken in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, and Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, is significant in this context as it explores how national identity and racial purity were undermined and challenged in these two localities from 1835 to 1871. The process of dispossessing, displacing and segregating Aboriginal peoples from these developing urban sites through history has impacted on these cities over time, and still impacts on these cities in the present. What is of interest are their commonalities based on settler colonialism and racialised relations around the Pacific Rim.

In most areas of Melbourne and Brisbane, non-Indigenous people are positioned as the owners of the buildings and the owners of the places — in much the same way as they control who has citizenship, who doesn't have citizenship and who has the right to grant citizenship (Lefebvre

1991). Even the naming of the geographic areas now known as Brisbane and Melbourne — with the names of significant people from the British Empire — is steeped in power and ownership of place. It speaks from the dominant culture that 'this is mine' and these names have become inscribed and embedded globally as markers of place. In this form of ownership, there is also demarcation of power and the ongoing reinforcement of the strategic place-making culture of the Australian settler-colonial (McGaw et al. 2011). Boucher and Russell (2012) describe how Aboriginal people were present in the city of Melbourne. As Edmonds (2010) and Boucher and Russell (2012) assert, the authorities had to work hard to keep Aboriginal people from the urban areas of Melbourne. These cities have also seen Indigenous Australians attempt to claim places in planned and sometimes unexpected ways. In other localities the number of Aboriginal peoples has grown over time through lower-cost housing and departmental housing availability and not by choice. In some areas Aboriginal people have had little engagement in the development of areas unless it has been through laws that attempt to restrict Aboriginal peoples (Potter 2012).

Over time, Aboriginal engagements and re-engagements with sites have been mediated via forms of surveillance and cultural guardianship. The statues of people such as Queen Victoria or King George that stand in Melbourne and Brisbane parklands, the British and European symbolism that adorns roofs and awnings, and the naming on buildings all act as signposts and symbols for 'who really made the nation' and who holds possession. Many of these names and symbols are reminiscent of names and symbols of a place from which people came (Figure 1, for example). These types of signs can be found all over Melbourne and Brisbane (and in other capital cities); they depict Australia's colonial past and demonstrate a sense of attachment and belonging to an imperialist regime.

Place and belonging within Melbourne and Brisbane are generally linked to white notions of Australian identity and citizenship. There is irony here in that, while the States of Victoria and Queensland try to bring everyone together under banners of inclusion and diversity, there are so many ongoing colonial stories of 'the settlers' and 'pioneers' who made the nation, which work to negate the sovereign rights of the Aboriginal population and continue to dispossess and disempower Aboriginal people on a daily basis through everyday activities.

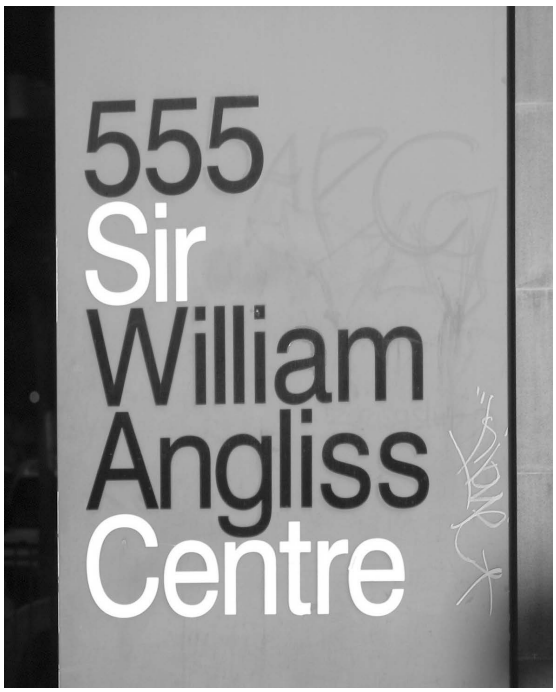

Figure 1: Signage to the Sir William Angliss Centre, Melbourne, 2009 (photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

Within the plethora of signs, symbols, images and representations throughout the cities, Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal sovereignty are suppressed and white Australians are able to exercise racialised power and their possessiveness of place (Moreton-Robinson 2007). Furthermore, the possessiveness and whiteness exercised is productive in that it constitutes both the white and the Aboriginal subject within the place and space. Aboriginal people are marked, made and positioned by our absence. Moreton-Robinson (2005:21–9) contends that possessiveness is 'predicated on the taking of other peoples' lands and resources for the benefit of Empire'. This exercising of possessiveness commenced with Britain taking possession of Australia and hasn't stopped; it has just changed forms.

In some areas of Melbourne and Brisbane it is apparent that Aboriginal people have

re-established or established physical sites where Aboriginal people can gather or offer services to Aboriginal people. Here, Aboriginal people can assert and re-assert presence and belonging. Within these places, Aboriginal people deliver child, health and legal services, and can control who can access the services and how they are offered. Aboriginal people have developed the physical sites, gained building approvals, undertaken renovations and applied for funding in relation to those sites. In all cases where this has happened, Aboriginal presence is clearly distinguishable by the signs, symbols and representations within and at that place. In essence, they have undertaken a process of reclaiming, belonging, attachment and Indigenous landscape-shaping for and by Aboriginal people (Fenster 2004, 2005a, 2005b).

The Victorian Aboriginal Health Service at 186 Nicholson Street, Fitzroy, is an example of such a place. It was developed, designed and planned by Aboriginal peoples for Aboriginal peoples in Victoria, and the signs and symbols assert identity, attachment and belonging to place and demonstrate who controls that place. Other organisations within the same suburb, such as the Melbourne Aboriginal Youth, Sport and Recreation Centre at 184 Gertrude Street and the 3CR 855 radio station on Smith Street (Figure 2), also feature prominent signage that identifies them as Indigenous places. The signage at the radio station has changed in recent times but it still identifies the place as an Aboriginal place within the streetscape. In addition, a plaque on the side of the Melbourne Aboriginal Youth, Sport and Recreation building states that 'the artworks were undertaken with the assistance of the City of Yarra Aboriginal Cultural Signage Group and the Aboriginal Reference Group'. It refers to the large artworks designed by Mandy Nicholson and fabricated by Wathaurong Glass, Geelong. The artwork covers all the front windows and doors of the building and the imagery is connected to the area. It includes images of boomerangs, gum leaves, water and a scar tree (Bunji Consultants 2002).

These sites and others demonstrate the capacity of Indigenous people to develop a place, to root identity and to ensure regulation of their environments (Dixon and Durrheim 2000). Fenster (1998:213) explains that 'ordinary people

Figure 2: 3CR 855 radio station, Smith Street, Fitzroy, 2009 (photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

continue to find creative ways of appropriating spaces and creating places, in spite of planning, to fulfil their desire as well as their needs, to tend the spirit as well as take care of the rent'. In this context, Dixon and Durrheim (2000:30) explain that people are cast as 'agents who are able to appropriate physical contexts in order to create, here, a space of attachment and rootedness, a space of being'. When Aboriginal people undertake this process, the sites of social struggle and contested realms of identity can cease to exist within that place (Foucault 1980:149). The place becomes clearly identified as a racialised place in favour of Aboriginal people.

At times, the mere presence of the designated site or place may be contested within that street, particularly if the street is racialised in favour of non-Indigenous people. Sometimes, there may be multiple recognitions and claims of space within the same area. For example, Figures 3 and 4 display signage on the same side of Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, within metres

of one another. One shows Aboriginal ownership and connection and establishment of place, and the other demonstrates colonial possession in the naming of land and the subdivision of land. The sign in Figure 4, which states 'Daughter of Captain John Brunswick Smythe, co-owner with Benjamin Baxter of the land subdivided in 1839', clearly links the land to colonial frontier relationships and de-territorialisation, including white non-Indigenous notions of Australian property rights, citizenship, control and ownership. Non-Indigenous people could only do this because of the dispossession of the local Wurundjeri people. The signage offers an example of how white Australians suppress Aboriginal sovereignty and how they exercise racialised power and possessiveness of place (Moreton-Robinson 2003, 2007). The sign could be viewed as an attempt to re-centre white power within a street that has numerous Aboriginal plaques and sites of significance. What results is that both the white and the Aboriginal subject are present within place and space.

In Brisbane, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are spread throughout the city. There are, however, distinct areas where Aboriginal people gather during NAIDOC Week and other events (such as Musgrave Park, South Brisbane). Some of these are traditional gathering places, and others are sites that have developed in the post-invasion era. Murals such as a recent one at South Brisbane (Figure 5) pop up from time to time on walls throughout the city. Some last over

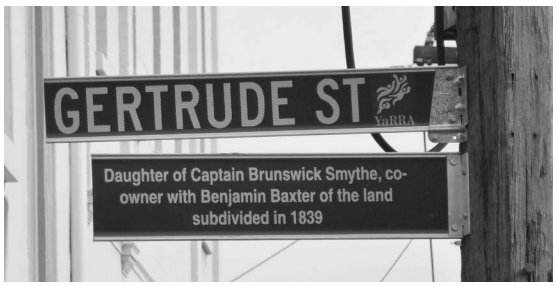

Figure 4: Signage in Fitzroy which records settler possession of land (photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

time; others, such as the one in the photograph, don't last long. This mural has now gone and a new building has been erected on the site next to the Mater Hospital. The Brisbane City Council has made some attempt to recognise places with naming; for example, Kurilpa Point (an area where Aboriginal people used to cross the Brisbane River). There are many places that could be additionally named. Moreover, the named places sometimes stand in complete opposition to the local colonial images and are juxtaposed in such a way that Aboriginal sovereignty is suppressed. Power is contested in these sites over and over again as white Australians exercise racialised power and possessiveness of and to those particular places (Moreton-Robinson 2007). In this way, the exercising of possession as written about by Moreton-Robinson (2003, 2005, 2007) has not stopped.

An exploration of place and space can reveal possible perceptions that can be gained and some

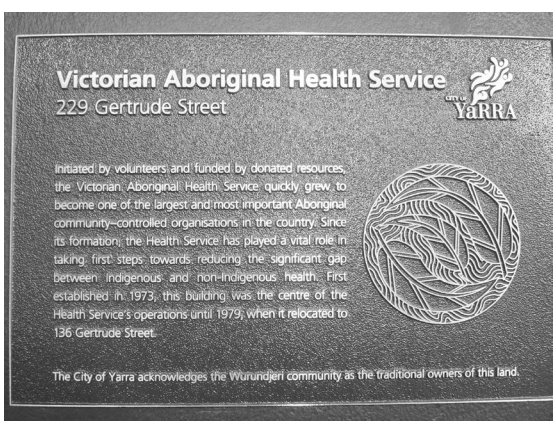

Figure 3: Signage for the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service, Fitzroy (photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

Figure 5: Mural in South Brisbane, 2005 (photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

actual relationships between individuals, groups, the institutions and architecture, which could either restrict or enable access and movement through streets and laneways and the buildings along them (Mills 2006). From the work of Gregory and Urry (1985:3), spatial structure is understood 'not merely as an arena in which social life unfolds, but rather as a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced'. Therefore, the very structure of the buildings on the streets and laneways provides a medium through which social relations are produced and reproduced. They also combine with physical and social relations, along with patterns and processes (Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1984; Soja 1989). People within the space, including Aboriginal people, interpret, represent, produce and reproduce social relations as they walk and dwell within Melbourne's and Brisbane's buildings, streets and laneways. As this occurs, some very clear messages are conveyed about inclusion, exclusion, belonging and marginalisation. If these emotions are evoked, they may be demonstrated through decisions not to go to a particular area, or to repeatedly go there or even a desire to live there. Places may clearly be identified as being safe or unsafe places. They can be recognised as white or Aboriginal, gay-friendly or child-friendly. Off to the left and right of the main streets in the same areas mentioned in this paper, further claiming can be identified. For example, Figure 6 shows an artwork bearing the Aboriginal flag down one of the laneways that runs off Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, in Melbourne. Further signs throughout the smaller laneways and shortcuts that criss-cross the main streets (Brunswick, Smith, Johnston and Nicholson Streets) represent the ongoing claiming of places and spaces that move between and throughout the area. Aboriginal people have always had a connection to this area of Melbourne and it has been a place to connect to and with other Aboriginal people (Bunji Consultants 2002).

Just because areas such as Fitzroy in Melbourne and South Brisbane in Brisbane appear to incorporate Aboriginality does not mean it is without struggle. To some extent, Aboriginality seems to be respected and honoured in public displays and public culture. Not everyone might see, feel or experience this in the same way. There may be varying understandings of these areas and sites of

Figure 6: Mural in a laneway that runs off Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, 2009 (photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

significance, even from Aboriginal people. The work of McGaw et al. (2011:305) demonstrates this in an example based in Smith Street, which straddles Collingwood and Fitzroy, when a three-year-old eucalypt that was looked after by a group of Aboriginal people was removed by the local council to make way for a public artwork to acknowledge and celebrate Indigenous people. They detail stories about who planted the tree, why it was planted and who watered it, and describe how Aboriginal people even decorated the tree in mourning for its removal. The artwork undertaken on the site — about Aboriginal sites of significance — was by a non-Indigenous artist. McGaw et al. (2011:307) state:

> The removal of the tree reinscribed a dominant non-[I]ndigenous narrative of what is meaning in place. Moreover, in its bid to improve the civic and commercial conditions of Smith Street, it ironically erased the liveability of the Smith and Stanley Street corner place, such as it was — a liveability that had grown out of organic engagements, communal practices and encounters.

What is revealed in the above example is the nature of the everyday, the daily lived experiences of place, and the differing realities of what makes place and continues meaning of places. It also reveals how people try and make and re-make place as to what they think place-making or places should be. Living within a place can be a differ-

ent experience to visiting a place, even repeatedly. Being an Aboriginal person living on the streets around South Brisbane or in Fitzroy may be very different from visiting the area as an Aboriginal person. I know this from my own experiences.

It also does not mean that there is not public resentment of Indigenous claims and specific rights (see Irving Saulwick and Associates 2000; Johnson, Sweeney and Associates 1996; Newspoll Market Research 2000). This may even come from other Indigenous peoples. It also does not mean that respectful recognition and understanding is widespread among the public. There can be a disparity between what is perceived by non-Indigenous people and the day-to-day reality lived by Aboriginal people. For example, in Brisbane a recent advertisement for Brisbane Arcade, which runs between Queen and Adelaide Streets in the central business district, uses an ochre-coloured background and dots, and yet an inspection of the arcade reveals very little that is Aboriginal. In fact, the majority of items in the arcade would be outside the purchasing ability of most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people based on Indigenous median income (Walter 2009).

Similar symbols can be found in the shops. Just up from the arcade in Brisbane's Queen Street Mall, numerous shops sell tourist souvenirs — many bear Aboriginal designs and were manufactured in China. Other shops sell discount items, including a $2.00 pack of stickers featuring historical pre-colonial images of Aboriginal people hunting and gathering (Figure 7). In the pack of stickers, only one image reflects contemporary Aboriginal culture: the Aboriginal flag. Since the stickers were purchased in one of the large discount shops in the Queen Street Mall, it can be assumed that they are probably available in other discount shops in other major cities, including Melbourne. There are clearly people benefiting through the profits of selling this type of imagery. The images benefit and perpetuate the ongoing ideology that 'real' Aboriginal people don't live in cities or that, somehow, we can't be urban-based and Aboriginal at the same time (Behrendt n.d.; Fredericks 2004, 2008b). There is a sense that somehow we can't be 'real' Aboriginal people if we ride Melbourne trams or Brisbane ferries and buses.

Figure 7: Pack of stickers for sale in a Brisbane shop, 2009 (photograph: Bronwyn Fredericks)

Conclusion

Places and spaces and their signs, symbols, images and representations are neither innocent nor neutral. They can work to marginalise and oppress or to include and engage. They are instruments of the political: they are embedded with power and unwritten laws informing Aboriginal people about whether we belong or whether we don't. In Australia this has been developed over time by non-Indigenous people, and is based on the dispossession of Aboriginal people and on their everyday practices (De Certeau 1984). During this time, non-Indigenous people have marked their presence with signs, symbols, representations and images. In marking their attachment, they also define how they position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people — both by our presence and our absence (Fredericks 2009). This, coupled with the ideas and concepts held by many non-Indigenous peoples about our identities,

attempts to make us and our identities invisible or unnecessary in the city — almost as if we should leave them at the jetty, bus station or city boundary. This paper has begun to explore some of the complex issues around identity, signs and symbols within urban spaces and places, and offered some examples from Melbourne and Brisbane. I don't claim to have all the answers. I seek to add to the dialogue and to demonstrate how Aboriginal people utilise agency and creativity within urban environments. We enact sovereignty through reconnection to places and landscape shaping, re-shaping and re-making, including the use of signs, symbols, images and representations to assert our connection and ownership.

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Bronwyn Fredericks is a Professor and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous Engagement), BMA Chair in Indigenous Engagement, and Chair of Academic Board at Central Queensland University Australia. Bronwyn is a member of the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) and her current research interests focus on the socio-psychological aspects of chronic disease, Indigenous women's issues and research that privileges Indigenous knowledges, methodologies and worldviews. She has published across several disciplines and within academic and community sources. Bronwyn has worked in the health care and human service arena at federal, state, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health service and sector levels for more than 30 years.

<b.fredericks@cqu.edu.au>