Culture Learning of Urban Aboriginals : Background, Characteristics and Implications

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INTRODUCTION

For the last decade or so, more and more urban dwellers of indigenous ancestry in Australia have been learning 'Aboriginal culture'. Since learning is, in a way, a voluntary effort for the improvement of the self, often from the real self to the ideal, culture learning by urban indigenous people can be a conscious activity to supplement something missing in respect to 'Aboriginal culture', which urban indigenous people perceive themselves. In this paper, I intend to explore the characteristics and the implications of culture learning, by examining the self-images of indigenous descendants in urban settings and their images about Aboriginals and their culture.

Indigenous peoples on the Australian mainland are generally referred to as Aboriginal(s). It was settlers from Europe mainly Britain who started to call indigenous peoples with this English word in the process of the interactions between the Europeans and indigenous peoples. So there were no 'Aboriginals' as such, as Attwood maintains [1989] prior to the European arrivals. Even after their settlement, the term itself was a mere category for the settlers to make a distinction between two parties.

The term 'Aboriginal(s)' now appears to have been accepted as the name for indigenous peoples as an ethnic or 'racial' group, but this is not necessarily the case. In the areas called 'remote' or 'outback' in Australia, where the majority of the residents are indigenous descendants with their own languages, they tend to place the priority on their tribal names for their ethnic or 'racial' belonging-ness. For them 'Aboriginal(s)' still remains a category.

Among urban dwellers of indigenous ancestry, however, a different situation exists. Urban indigenous people speak English as their first language, and most of them often say that they have inherited little knowledge of their ancestral culture. This is because most urban indigenous people, if not all, are either those or descendants of those who were institutionally forced to abandon their ancestral way of life, and instead to learn a European way of life over the past 200 years. Owing to the 'Europeanisation' process, urban dwellers of indigenous ancestry tend to use the term 'Aboriginal(s)' to express their identity. For them, it is not a mere categorical term.

In addition to this, what seems interesting is that there has been for a decade or so, a trend among urban indigenous people, of learning 'Aboriginal culture'. This seems puzzling because it is said that one learns one's own culture almost unconsciously as one is growing up. So culture learning among urban Aboriginal people would be an effort to improve them

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in respect with the 'Aboriginal culture'. What lies beneath their learning culture, that is, its intention, would vary. What is clear, however, would be that urban Aboriginals are trying to fulfil something they feel missing in themselves by culture learning, and then to improve themselves.

In the following sections, I will explore what has made urban Aboriginals learn 'Aboriginal culture' by looking into their self-images and ideal images they have about themselves as indigenous descendants. By doing so, it is possible to discuss what they learn as Aboriginal culture, and what kind of outcome would be expected from their culture learning.

The information in this paper was collected during my research mainly between 1989 to 1993 followed by regular research trips to Australia every winter up to 1999.

TWO FACADES OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINALS

According to Australia's national census of 1996, the indigenous population counts a little over 250,000 [AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 1997]. Of them, indigenous people on the mainland, Aboriginals, compose almost 90 percent, that is a little less than 225,000.

With the Aboriginal population, it seems possible to divide it roughly into two segments. One consists of those who live in areas like the central desert or the coastlines of the northern part of the continent, which are often referred to as outback or remote. So I call Aboriginal people in such areas outback Aboriginals just for the sake of convenience.

Outback Aboriginals comprise less than 30 percent of the total Aboriginal population. They are said to live in a more or less 'traditional' manner because they generally speak in their tribal languages, live in small communities based mainly on kin, keep their religious practices and maintain strong attachments to their land. This is because their contact with the European civilization took place late in the contact history of Australia and therefore they have had less influence from non-Aboriginal people.

The rest of the Aboriginal population is composed of those who live mainly in urban areas dotted mostly along the south-east and south-west corners of Australia, where the majority of the population are non-Aboriginal. These are where European settlers started development at the early stage of contact history, and are often referred to as 'settled Australia'.

In the late 19th century after a lot of massacres and the destruction of tribes, surviving Aboriginal people in these areas were placed under the protection policy, by which Aboriginal people were confined within an institution called a reserve or a Christian mission. In such institutions, Aboriginals were exposed to, and forced to learn, European civilization, including the English language and religion. Along with reserve confinement, many young children were forcefully separated from their parents into dormitories or fostered into European families. Consequently, many of them lost their ties to their parents and tribes. Today, they are called 'stolen children'.

After World War II, almost 70 years since the introduction of the reserve system, Aboriginals became freed from and allowed to leave reserves. Many of them, having been deprived of their ancestral land a long time before had few other choices than migrating into

cities for their living. That was a major reason for the increase of the indigenous population in cities.

When they started their city life, many of them tried to live like other non-Aboriginals, hiding their being Aboriginal lest they should experience antagonism from the European dominated Australian society [BARWICK 1964]. They could do so mainly because many of them spoke English as a first language and had enough knowledge about how to live a European way of life. And owing to heavy contacts with Europeans for generations, they looked non-Aboriginal enough to pass into the mainstream of Australian society. In addition, Australian authorities encouraged them to assimilate.

The reality, however, is far from them being assimilated into the mainstream of society. Aboriginal demography in urban areas has shown a remarkable increase of population at an unusual rate for the last three decades. According to the national censuses, it grew from roughly 25,000 in 1966 to 190,000 in 1996 [AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 1971; 1976; 1997]. Sydney alone experienced an over 100 percent increase from 1976 to 1996, to about 25,000 [AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS 1997].

It was once explained that such a rapid increase of Aboriginal population in urban areas was brought about by migration from rural or remote areas [WESTERN 1982: 218-223]. Truly, Aboriginal migrations to urban settings were phenomenal from the 1950s to the 1970s [WAIT 1951a; 1951b; GALE 1972; BEASLEY 1975]. At the same time, outback Aboriginals, while their demographic situation showed a stable increase, generally suffered a higher infant mortality rate and poorer living conditions during that time [SUZUKI 1993: 37]. This meant that outback Aboriginals did not have enough population reserves to push up urban Aboriginal demography. Also, Aboriginal migrations between the census periods are so small as to be negligible [CASTLES 1989: 7]. So there should be particular factors involved for rapid population growth of urban indigenous people, though this is not an immediate concern of this paper. One thing for sure is that since national censuses adopt self-claim for the question of ethnic or racial origin, the Aboriginal population growth is brought about by the fact that more and more Aboriginal people in urban areas make public their ancestry. This has happened even though prejudice and discrimination against Aboriginals still prevail.

Today, most of the major cities are home to third and fourth generations of indigenous descendants, of whom it seems possible to point out several common features. Firstly, since they speak English and live an urban life, it does not always seem easy, at least on the surface, to make a distinction between urban Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people. Even when they are noticed, the differences might well be attributed to individual differences. Secondly, it is not unusual to hear them say that they have some difficulty in tracing their ancestral tribes and little knowledge about their ancestral way of life, nor do they have Aboriginal culture as such in urban areas owing to past experiences.

From these considerations, it is clear that urban Aboriginal people are not simply those of Aboriginal ancestry who came to live in urban settings for some reason or another. Rather, they are people who were heavily influenced culturally and socially by the non-Aboriginal population and hence have emerged as a consequence of the process of contacts between the indigenous people and European Australians for the last 200 years.

ABORIGINAL SYDNEYSIDERS

In general, most of the Aboriginal Sydneysiders (residents in the Sydney area) are considered descendants of those who migrated from outside Sydney sometime in the past, mainly after World War II [WAIT 1951a; 1951b; BEASLEY 1975]. People came from various areas within New South Wales and across the state borders as well. Today, the Aboriginal population in the Sydney area counts over 25,000, which is twelve times more than the 1966 figure of 2,147, and more than twice the 1976 figure. The demographic distribution of Aboriginal Sydneysiders is inclined to the younger generation. There are second and third generations in Sydney born here as well as in other major cities.

One of the noteworthy characteristics of Aboriginal Sydneysiders is that they do not have any specific area or suburb where a demographic concentration of the population can be seen. Truly, one suburb, namely Redfern, is almost always mentioned as if it were an 'Aboriginal area' or sometimes 'Aboriginal ghetto' in Sydney. But as Table 1 shows, Aboriginal population is dispersed all over the areas around Sydney.

This is a peculiar tendency. For in most multi-ethnic societies like the U.S.A., Canada or even Australia itself, those who consider themselves and are perceived to have a distinct cultural background, different from the mainstream one, tend to live close together, forming geographically defined ethnic communities of their own. This is because, by living close, they can provide daily conveniences, help one another and protect themselves, if necessary, from outside threat or pressure. This would be more so with those like Aboriginals, who are considered minorities (socially and culturally) and vulnerable to discrimination. But this is not the case with Aboriginal Sydneysiders. Truly they are in a way distinctive as descendants of Australian indigenous people but the population dispersion may well indicate that there are few culturally motivating elements that facilitate them to live close together with a view to ensuring convenience in daily life. That is, they may not have as many difficulties as other ethnic minorities immigrating into Australia would encounter. That is why they do not form an ethnic community in a geographical sense.

Another characteristic concerns the socioeconomic status among Aboriginal Sydneysiders. Generally, their unemployment rate stays higher than the Australian average and they tend to be hired last and fired first. Even if they are lucky enough to be employed, Aboriginal people are more likely to be found in the lower range of the income strata, and their occupations vary as seen in Table 2. From the table, it is possible to say that there is no specific occupation particular to them. Again this can be seen as a pattern different from that which the other ethnic groups display (see for example, Glazer and Moynihan [1963]), for they tend to autonomously occupy or sometimes monopolize a certain occupational category in a multi-ethnic society.

In recent years, affirmative action programmes for minorities have improved the employment situation of Aboriginals in public sectors, that is, local, state or commonwealth government offices. From this, you could argue that there is commonality in Aboriginal occupation. But such commonality in occupation is brought about by external causes, namely the social policy of affirmative action programmes. Rather the fact that Aboriginal people are more likely to find their employment in public services than in private sectors

Table 1. Distribution of the Aboriginal Population in Sydney Area (1986 Census)

Region	Male	Female	Total	Rate of Increase (1986/1971)
Ashfield	70	84	154	2.299
Auburn	75	87	162	2.613
Bankstown	299	331	630	3.684
Baulkham	58	49	107	1.911
Blacktown	1396	1534	2930	5.768
Blue Mountain	164	136	300	4.478
Botany	136	141	277	3.337
Burwood	40	37	77	1.711
Camden	25	26	51	n/a
Campbell	806	836	1642	26.484
Canterbury	231	236	467	2.975
Concord	12	16	28	n/a
Drummoune	14	21	35	1.129
Fairfield	404	445	849	3.508
Gosford	261	261	522	5.495
Hawkesbury	135	135	270	n/a
Holroyd	159	157	316	2.273
Hornsby	70	87	157	1.744
Hunter's Hill	10	7	17	n/a
Hurstville	79	77	156	3.9
Kograh	27	44	71	2.29
Ku-Ring-Gai	21	19	40	1.081
Lane Cove	14	14	28	n/a
Leichardt	190	203	393	1.116
Liverpool	444	468	912	3.281
Manly	38	26	64	0.516
Marrickville	310	366	676	1.583
Mosman	9	7	1	6n/a
North Sydney	24	27	51	1.594
Parramatta	291	296	587	3.941
Penrith	613	605	1218	5.745
Randwick	430	372	802	1.569
Rockdale	84	75	159	1.71
Ryde	59	57	116	2.148
Strathfield	27	28	55	1.279
Sutherland	204	233	437	2.993
Sydney	541	615	1156	1.42
Warringah	103	99	202	2
Waverly	72	73	145	1.883
Willoughby	22	29	51	1.889
Wollondilly	70	66	136	3.163
Woollahra	23	40	63	1.285
Wyong	295	306	601	10.927

Source: Suzuki [1995: 50]

Table 2. Occupations of Aboriginal People in the south-western suburb in Sydney Area (%)

Occupation	Aboriginal (n=2,479)	Non-Aboriginal (n=531,230)
Agriculture	1.3	1.3
Mining	0.4	0.5
Manufacturing	17.5	23.2
Electric	2.5	2.2
Building	7.5	7.2
Sales	15.3	20.1
Transport	6.7	6.2
Communication	2.5	2.5
Finance	7.7	10.9
Public service	28.5	20.4
Others/unknown	5.6	7.8

Source: PEAT MARWICK HUNGERSFORDS MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS [1989: 7]

(Note: Not known whether or not Torres Strait Islanders are included.)

may indicate that there are not many employment areas available to them except public services.

With only these characteristics of Aboriginal Sydneysiders in respect of their residential distribution and occupational tendency, it seems possible to say that they are in a way divided socially, and hence not very visible as a group entity. Additionally, in many cases it is often difficult to make a distinction between them and non-Aboriginal Australians from physical appearance, which makes them 'invisible' in another way.

Aboriginal Sydneysiders manipulate their invisibility in a variety of ways in interactions with non-Aboriginal Australians. For example, when I was doing research in 1990, I saw a notice at the entrance of an Aboriginal owned shop. It said, 'there are many types of Aboriginals, they are not all black.' In this case, the shop owner had to insist on her being Aboriginal purposefully, that is, she had to overcommunicate her identity, probably because she did not want to be mistaken as a non- Aboriginal.

Another example was given by a female student aged 19 (in 1989). She said that she would never disclose being Aboriginal when looking for a part-time job. Rather, she said, she pretended to be of Middle Eastern ancestry, because it was easier to get a position than by disclosing being Aboriginal and prevented prejudice or discrimination against her. In her case, she manipulated her invisibility by undercommunicating her identity. These two measures for handling invisibility would not be particular to urban Aboriginals, but rather seem common among socially and culturally disadvantaged people in general.

Since Aboriginal people are 'invisible' as such, they often find themselves unable to be identified as Aboriginal by non-Aboriginal people, who tend to say that urban Aboriginals do not look Aboriginal. And even among Aboriginal people, this can happen, too. Therefore, they are sometimes caught in a discrepancy between self-identity and a label given by others.

IMAGES OF ABORIGINALS IN AUSTRALIA

Although there are many images of Aboriginals prevailing in Australia today, it is possible to categorise them into two kinds: negative and favourable.

Negative images of Aboriginals originated in the early relations between indigenous people and European settlers. Captain Cook described indigenous peoples as 'noble savages', when he sailed into Botany Bay in 1770 and sighted the people there. This was a typical view of that century. But once colonisation started, such a view instantly disappeared. Settlers regarded the indigenous people as 'inferior', 'dirty', 'lazy', and treated them as such by trying to ignore their presence. Later, they segregated Aboriginal people into reserves and forced them to learn the colonisers', that is, superior from their viewpoint, way of life. This led, according to Rowley [1970], to the destruction of Aboriginal society.

In 1967, only 30 years or so ago, Aboriginal people gained Australian full citizenship. Afterwards, particularly in the 1970s, Aboriginal matters were a kind of symbol for human rights movements in Australia. They had massive support domestically and internationally. Aboriginal people could appeal to the guilt feelings of the general Australian public. In response to these movements, new social services and government offices specialising in Aboriginal affairs, such as the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, for example, were established and new laws were passed to aid socially disadvantaged people, along with an increase of public expenditure and the introduction of affirmative action programmes. In such a changing atmosphere, Australian society as a whole became tolerant to minorities, particularly to indigenous peoples.

Despite such favourable changes to Aboriginals, stereotypic images of them formed in the early stage of contact history are still persistent [TAFT 1975; WESTERN 1982]. In media reports, Aboriginal matters tend to be referred to far more and disproportionately often when the population composition of Australia is taken into account. And they 'were much more likely to be presented as disruptive or demanding than as citizens who have made a positive contribution to our society' [WARMAN 1990: 53]. In addition, a new criticism of the minorities is now making itself heard as social services and institutions are improved; for example, they have too much 'special treatment' or 'special privileges' [BOURKE 1998: 6]. Among them, Aboriginal people are more likely to be a target or scapegoat of such criticisms, particularly owing to the recent dramatic recognition of native title and land rights matters. This is because Aboriginal land claims may well clash with the interests of some non-Aboriginal people.

Besides these two images, one historically bred on the basis of Social Darwinism, and the other stemming from ungrounded jealousy, there is another kind of image about Aboriginals in Australia. That has something to do with indigenous culture.

People could see signs of it in the 1970s, but it was in the 1980s that Australia officially adopted multiculturalism as a national policy. Although the introduction of this policy resulted from the migrant presence in Australia, it also included the indigenous peoples (much against their wishes). In this policy, Aboriginal culture was positioned as a unique national heritage for all Australians [AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF MULTICULTURAL AFFAIRS 1982: 17]. This new stance was obviously a drastic change from negative to positive in the

evaluations of Aboriginal culture.

It should be noted, however, that Aboriginal culture thus highly elevated has more to do with outback Aboriginals than urban. For outback Aboriginals tend to be regarded as maintaining their ancestral way of life, hence being traditional and authentic, while urban Aboriginals are much more 'westernised' and hence not much different from Australians in general. So, images constructed around Aboriginal culture as Australia's unique heritage are naturally related to what can often be seen in the outback. Qantas, Australia's national flag carrier, for example, owns two Jumbo jets painted with countless dots of bright colours. Its design originates in Aboriginal painting of the central desert, better known as dot painting. Another example is the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games logo. This uses a combination of v-shaped curves, representing an athlete. Those v-shaped curves never fail to remind us of boomerangs, Aboriginal hunting tools and a typical exemplification of Aboriginal traditional material culture.

The utilisation of Aboriginal culture is not confined to such visible elements. The torch relay for the 2000 Olympic Games started from Uluru. This is much better known as Ayers Rock, one of Australia's main tourist spots, but more importantly it is a sacred site for the Aboriginal people of Central Australia and a symbolic place for the indigenous land rights movement. And in the opening ceremony, the main attractions in performances were of indigenous flavour. Even just those examples are enough to show that Aboriginal culture related images are 'tradition oriented', not urban oriented.

It is quite clear that things Aboriginal are much more worth using as a major national symbol of Australia because they originate in Australia, and are thus distinctively Australian. So, when it comes to international affairs or tourism promotions, authentic Australians are naturally much more appealing. In this sense, outback Aboriginal culture, whether materialistic or symbolic, is more appropriate and of higher utility to advocate the cultural difference and originality of Australia on the international scene, because everything else has roots mostly in Europe.

Self-Images 1

In this section, I will examine the self-images of urban Aboriginals in two phases. The first examination is of what kind of perception urban Aboriginal people have about being of Aboriginal ancestry, and how they internalise and reflect this in the course of their lives. Secondly I focus on their self-images as urban Aboriginals in relation to the images they have about 'Aboriginal'. In order to carry out this task, I present three cases, all male adults, and refer to other information including data of my own where necessary. For privacy reasons, the three people are referred to as Males 1, 2 and 3.

Before I present the Sydney cases, let me show how Europeanised Aboriginal people perceived themselves in the early days when they started to live in cities.

Figures 1 and 2 are from magazines issued in the 1930s and 1940s respectively. They indicate a racist view of Aboriginals, but putting this argument aside, another interpretation is possible: Europeanised Aboriginals depicted in European clothes did not seem to recognise themselves as Aboriginals. For the urban Aboriginals in the pictures, Aboriginal

Minns, *The Bulletin*, 24 May 1933
Aborigine v. Aborigine

ALL WHITE
Hiker: *Many blacks in this district?*
Abo: *Not one. You'll have to travel a hundred miles now before you sight a nigger.*

Fig. 1.
(Source: Swain [1989: 23])

McGregor, *Smith's Weekly*, 26
January 1940
Aborigine v. Aborigine

'Look, Dad — blackfellas!'
Fig. 2.
(Source: Swain [1989: 24])

people were those who lived in the outback or in a tribal manner practising hunting. At the same time, it can be seen that readers and the artists, who were non-Aboriginal Australians, thought that there was no difference between Europeanised Aboriginals and those in the outback. There was a clear colour bar between non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginals, which Aboriginal descendants could not cross no matter how Europeanised. These two figures show overt racial prejudice against Aboriginal people.

Let me move to the cases in Sydney today.

Case 1

Male 1 is in his 50s. He came to Sydney with his parents when he was 15 or 16 years of age. His mother needed hospitalisation because of her illness. Since then, he has lived there, and now he is a self-employed builder doing many kinds of jobs.

According to Male 1, his parents always told him to be diligent, punctual, neat and clean, and to stay away from alcohol in his childhood and adolescence. These virtues, his parents said, are exactly the opposite of what Australians (here non-Aboriginals) attribute to Aboriginals, and so to avoid any harassment from Australians, it was important for Male 1 to keep a low profile. Male 1, as he said, has obediently observed what his parents told him all his life until now. He says, 'I do not want anybody to misunderstand me'. 'Misunderstand me' here means he does not want others (non-Aboriginal people) to project prevailing negative Aboriginal stereotype images upon him.

Thanks to his attitude and behaviour, he does not think he has ever had any bitter experiences such as overt prejudice or discrimination. And though he knows that Australian society has become more tolerant to Aboriginals, and has allowed Aboriginals to make public their being of indigenous ancestry, he still keeps to what his parents told him, and has told his own children what he was taught in his young days.

Case 2

According to Male 2, he was born of a white father and an Aboriginal mother. He spent his teens in the late 1960s and saw the Aboriginal political movements of the 1970s. At that time, however, he was not much interested in such affairs, he said. He admits that he does not look Aboriginal because of his fair skin, and is often mistaken for a white person. So, in his young days, he tried to pass himself off in Australian society as a white. But this was not ease in the small country town where he was born and raised. In his twenties, he left his hometown and settled in Sydney. Here, life was 'more or less OK', he said. But because of his poor educational background, he could not expect much of a future.

One day he happened to find a scholarship available to Aboriginal people. He thought this was a chance given to him and decided to 'come out'. Luckily, he was given the scholarship for his university education. He explained his decision, saying he 'had been hungry for knowledge since he was a kid'. Study at university changed him a lot. Learning Aboriginal history and culture, he decided not to keep a low profile when it came to Aboriginal affairs.

Finishing his university education, he found a job as a liaison officer at one of the universities in Sydney. At work he regularly councils Aboriginal students and sometimes teaches a class of Aboriginal history as part of the regular course. In conversations with Aboriginal students, he always emphasises what he calls the Aboriginal view. He divides Australians into two kinds: good Australians and bad Australians. The former are of course Aboriginals and the latter non-Aboriginals. He maintains to students visiting his office that Aboriginal people were and are victims of the white invasion of Australian society, and tells them to stand and fight back on behalf of their Aboriginal fellows.

He believes that by emphasising being Aboriginal and a long-time victim of the white regime, he can appeal to the guilt feeling among white people. For him, being Aboriginal could be, in a sense, an instrument with which to confront the dominant white majority. So, he believes that Aboriginal people should share with their Aboriginal fellows a common historical and social view that Aboriginals have been exploited too much.

Due to his appearance, which often causes 'misunderstanding' about his background, he always wears or carries something distinguishable as Aboriginal, which are coloured in black, yellow and red. These are the colours first used in the Aboriginal flag, invented in the Aboriginal movement when young Aboriginals set up a tent as their 'Embassy' in the front yard of the Commonwealth Parliament in Canberra in 1972. Clothing or small accessories of these three colours, according to Male 2, help him to publicise his being Aboriginal.

Case 3

Male 3 was 23, a university student when I met him in 1989. His parents were both full-time employed public servants. According to him, he had never experienced any overt racism throughout his life. When he started his formal education, the government encouraged Aboriginal students to stay in school and provided various scholarships for them. For Male 3, affirmative action programmes were there. He never thought he should emphasise being Aboriginal, nor be aggressive when he demanded something from the government. And in his teens, the Australian Government introduced multiculturalism as a national policy. In that policy, Aboriginal culture was nominated as a unique national heritage of Australian people. This gave Male 3 a kind of pride, though he himself never touched anything of Aboriginal culture as such except his family relations, if they are part of Aboriginal culture as such.

For Male 3, being Aboriginal is just a given, nothing he has to show off, nor an instrument for negotiations with the government.

At the same time, however, Male 3 does not like other Australians thinking that Aboriginals are lazy, drunk or idle, doing nothing all day long. He wants them to know that there are many kinds of Aboriginals in Australia. He also believes that if he encounters any difficulty in his life, he would not like to think it was because of his background. Even if so, he would face and try to overcome it by his efforts, he said. By doing so, Australians' attitudes towards Aboriginals cannot but change, he added.

From these three cases it seems possible to grasp how they internalise and reflect their self-perceptions in their lives.

Male 1 tries to present himself as distant from the common images of Aboriginals such as 'lazy', 'dirty', 'loose', 'inferior', etc., which Australians in general tend to have about Aboriginals. Keeping a low profile and being reluctant to disclose one's ancestry along with a strict self-restraint do not seem uncommon among urban Aboriginals. Barwick, studying Melbourne Aboriginal people, reported that the people there tended to hide their ancestral background [1964]. Also in Morgan's *My Place* [1984], the author said that her mother and she herself were taught not to disclose being Aboriginal and to pretend to be immigrants from India.

They took such a measure to hide their Aboriginal ancestry, because they perceived the general public in Australia as unfavourable to Aborigines and feared some kind of harassment. This had something to do with the status Aboriginal people were given at that time. As is well known, Aboriginal people were excluded from the national census until 1971. That meant Aboriginals were not regarded as Australian citizens except for some who were awarded special exemption. On top of this, very negative images were attached to Aboriginals right from the beginning of contact history and these persist. So, what Male 1 did was to try to 'behave himself' so that he might not be thought of as an Aboriginal.

But in the late 1960s through the 1970s, when Male 2 spent his adolescence, Aboriginal social movements became active, and Aboriginals started to blame non-Aboriginals for their past deeds. In accusing the European Australians, Aboriginals did not mention the fact that they once tried to live as white Australians. Instead, another scenario was produced: Aboriginals as victims were emphasised. The history of their miseries and the ordeal their predecessors experienced were amplified and made use of as a bargaining count for the betterment of their position in society. Here, there appeared a dichotomy of Aboriginals as victims or 'goodies', and whites as oppressors, baddies. Male 2 is not hesitant to teach this picture of Australian history and society to his students. Many Aboriginal people share this, too. The following passage is from an article in *Identity*, an Aboriginal magazine edited by Kathie Walker, the late Aboriginal poet and opinion leader.

> My upbringing was on a mission station and I can't help wondering if one of the reasons for the decline of principle and character of some of the Aboriginal people has been that they blindly accepted the teachings of the established churches. That, in itself, is not wrong. The conflict occurs when one reads the laws of the Holy Bible and then takes a look at what clerics say and do.... [RANDALL 1971: 1(2)]

This kind of view, dichotomising the Australian society and directing harsh criticism at European Australians, still persists. But yet another self-evaluation has been prevailing among Aboriginals. People, like Male 3, tend to think of being Aboriginal as just a given, almost parallel to an ethnic background such as Italian or Chinese. For those who take this stance, Aboriginal history is important, but not for blackmailing Australians in general into improving their social positions. Some people hesitate to be evaluated on the ground of

being Aboriginal [THOMPSON 1990]. They want to attribute their achievement not to being Aboriginal, but to their ability.

The cases of different generations are presented in order to show clear differences in perceptions about having Aboriginal ancestry. But let me say that this does not necessarily mean that Aboriginal images vary from generation to generation. These three kinds of perceptions co-exist in urban settings. Someone of Male 1's age can have Male 2's view about Aboriginals, and another person in Male 3's generation may have the same opinion as Male 1. Self-images are not fixed, but rather changeable. They may well vary from one time to another. So, most people will perceive themselves differently at different stages of their lives.

However, there are two things for sure about the perceptions of being Aboriginal. One is that urban Aboriginals feel and are aware of negative images prevailing and persistently held among non-Aboriginal people. Therefore, Aboriginal people tend to take two kinds of attitudes toward Australian society and its people, over- or under-communication of their ethnic identity.

The other thing is that as a recent phenomenon, more and more Aboriginal people tend to willingly disclose their ancestry as the population growth as mentioned earlier in this paper indicates. And also they are more likely to say proudly that they are Aboriginals. This implies that Aboriginal people are now becoming more self-confident. This is another drastic change, along with the evaluation of Aboriginal culture by the Government, on the part of urban dwellers of indigenous ancestry compared with those who tried to hide their ethnic or racial background when they started to live in a city.

Self-Images 2

So what do these three people think of urban Aboriginals? Male 1 described them as modern or non-traditional people. Here 'modern' means Westernised, or like European Australians. He said he does not know anything about 'traditional', and advised me that the term 'traditional Aboriginals' should be applied to those living in the central desert or in Arnhem Land, the northern end of the mainland. For Male 1 thinks that desert people or coastal people are still almost free of European influence and live in a tribal manner. In this regard, each of the three persons agreed, albeit using different expressions.

The characteristics they pointed out of 'traditional Aboriginals' are quite identical. Traditional Aboriginals are free of or less influenced by European Australians, speak their own tribal language, maintain close kinship systems, live by hunting and gathering, have spiritual rituals, barely wear clothes and live in small communities far away from cities.

When they mentioned these features, it seemed that although urban Aboriginals feel some differences between desert people and coastal people, they are not familiar with either. Since outback Aboriginals live too far away from cities, they are not an immediate reality to urban indigenous people. So, for them, almost everything related to Aboriginals either in the central desert or in Arnhem Land, is 'traditional' or 'tribal'. The differences between urban Aboriginals and 'traditional people' in the remote areas are much larger than the ones among outback peoples. Therefore, it does not bother urban Aboriginals to mix all the outback

Aboriginal peoples together when they think of 'traditional Aboriginals' and their culture. In this sense, the 'traditional Aboriginals' they assume do not exist as a reality. Rather they are imaginary people. And when urban Aboriginals say they do not have any 'traditional' culture in cities, they either consciously or unconsciously compare themselves with their imaged Aboriginals. The characteristics they pointed out above are, therefore, the elements they use in constructing their illusory Aboriginals, or imagery of Aboriginals.

It is not only urban Aboriginals who have constructed imaginary Aborigines, but also non-Aboriginal Australians, that is Euro-Australians, have similar kinds of ideas about the indigenous people of Australia. When they are asked who are the 'real' Aboriginals, they tend to look at the outback Aboriginals and they tend to say urban Aboriginals are not 'real' ones.

Until recently, it was commonly said that most Euro-Australians had never met or even seen Aboriginal people, though this is not the case any longer. In Sydney, for example, people can buy Aboriginal arts and crafts, and see Aboriginal performances almost every day as tourist attractions. So there are chances for non-Aboriginal people to see 'Aboriginal people and their culture'.

It should be noted, however, that what is shown on such occasions, is almost always something 'traditional' like dancing and music. Dancers are all black in their skin colour (if not, they use make-up), painted with white ochre, and the musical instruments are sticks and didgaridoos. By such means, the audiences are almost always reminded of the authenticity of Aboriginal culture and are made to recall outback Aboriginals, not urban Aboriginal people. Again non-Aboriginal Australians hardly make any distinction between desert and coastal peoples. They would be more likely to mix those two kinds of Aboriginals together to form their images of Aboriginals. From the imaginary Aboriginals and their culture, then, they compare urban Aboriginals with 'traditional' Aboriginals and describe the former as not real.

Besides such 'grass-roots' images of Aboriginals, there are what might be called 'official' indicators to characterise Aboriginals, as referred to by Keffee [COOMBS, BRANDL and SNOWDON 1983: 21; KEFFEE 1988: 74]. These indicators are extracted from research results in the central desert and in the northern coast areas with a view to promote further understanding of the Aboriginal people among civil servants, so that social services may be distributed more effectively. The listed indicators include language and religion besides descent, personal identity and ancestors' history. As can be seen, they are more to do with outback Aboriginals. Since the list was produced by the Government, the images emerging from it about Aboriginal 'tradition' could be accepted by Australians in general, and may confirm what is held in Australian society as images of 'traditional' Aboriginals and their culture. And such 'official' Aboriginal images coincide with what the three Sydneysiders portrayed as 'traditional' Aboriginals. This indicates that Aboriginal Sydneysiders recognise a discrepancy between what they are as Aboriginal descendants and what Aboriginals should be. That is, Sydneysiders of Aboriginal ancestry feel that although they are Aboriginal, they may miss something that Aboriginals should have if they are Aboriginal. And they also feel they have to recover it in order to be recognised as Aboriginal.

CULTURE LEARNING

Culture learning among urban Aboriginals started in the form of the Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Camp sometime in the 1980s [KEFFEE 1988]. This was when self-images of urban Aboriginals were changing from negative to positive, and 'Aboriginal Culture' started to be recognised as something symbolic of Australia by the introduction of the national policy of multiculturalism. Culture learning by urban Aboriginals was therefore promoted by the following winds of the changing social atmosphere towards Aboriginals.

The purpose of learning culture was initially to obtain more knowledge about it and hence to strengthen identity as an Aboriginal [KEFFEE 1988]. Today, many Aboriginal people in urban settings are now learning 'Aboriginal culture' in some way or another for the same reason. They are learning at schools, universities or at Aboriginal organisations. By learning, they think they can complete themselves with what they feel they are missing as Aboriginals.

In learning they mostly use anthropological monographs and works, autobiographies, paintings, music and dancing. Some even visit outback areas in the name of traditional Aboriginal culture studies or tours.

Whatever form culture learning takes, personal or organisational, it can surely help raise awareness as Aboriginals among urban indigenous people, re-enforce their identity as Aboriginal descendants, bolster ethnicity and allow them to assume an air of Aboriginality. Ethnicity as such would have something of resistance to the wider Australian society as Keffee [1989] and Hollinsworth [1992] maintain. This is very true because ethnicity is 'an aspect of social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups' with whom they interact not infrequently [ERIKSEN 1994: 12]. Ethnicity is, in this sense, political in nature. It is more so when people like Aboriginals, who have been long neglected and discriminated against, try to claim and establish their ethnicity intentionally in an overt form. So, culture learning itself is a response and resistance to criticisms from the mainstream of Australian society; that is, urban Aboriginals do not have Aboriginal culture as such, or they do not look like Aboriginals.

Culture learning, however, is more than just a response or resistance to European dominated Australian sniping.

As mentioned above, the 'traditional Aboriginal culture' that urban Aboriginals refer to and try to learn is, in essence, imaginary and made up of various elements extracted from what urban Aboriginals think 'traditional people' and their culture should be, almost entirely from outback peoples and their cultures. These elements overlap what non-Aboriginal Australians think Aboriginal 'tradition' should comprise. In this sense, the 'traditional culture' urban Aboriginals strive to attain is, in reality, a reflection of what non-Aboriginal Australians accept as 'true Aboriginal'.

Moreover, it is not necessary to incorporate all the extracted elements into urban life. Hunting and gathering are neither learned nor practised in urban life. Nor are the tribal languages outback people speak. More important in the process of extraction is that almost every element to be taken is de-contextualised and crystallised in urban settings, and

interpreted in the way that urban people feel appropriate.

One female student, for example, had been brought up in a non-Aboriginal environment but suddenly, at the age of 17, started saying she had an Aboriginal ancestry. Since then she has identified herself as an Aboriginal. When she learned in the class of Aboriginal culture that Aboriginal people have a totem, she started to claim that her totem was a monkey. Her classmates accepted and recognised her claim, although monkeys are not native to Australia and hence cannot be Aboriginal totems in a 'traditional' sense. For her, having her own totem was a proof of her being Aboriginal. She has obtained something with which she can exhibit her indigenous descent.

Such an interpretation of Aboriginal culture by that female student might be censured as a perversion or travesty of one element for the pursuit of her own personal purpose. But the above episode vividly depicts how urban Aboriginal people translate and incorporate an element they think of as distinctively Aboriginal. So the above example of interpreting the totem could show how elements are 'urbanised'. Similar phenomena occur in the area of painting. As is well known, there are clear distinctions between desert and northern coastal paintings. In the former, dot-paintings are common, while the latter are characterised by crosshatches. Urban Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal Australians regard both as traditional and authentic. Despite vast differences in motif however, urban Aboriginals, almost without question, tend to combine these two designs in their actual paintings, and regard the finished work as 'traditional'. Tourists often see pictures of the Opera House depicted with dots and crosshatches, certified with a tag indicating 'authentic Aboriginal painting'.

Other similar works of this kind are now widely accepted as 'traditionally Aboriginal' among urban indigenous people as well as non-Aboriginal Australians and tourists, although outback peoples feel that such paintings have nothing to do with themselves. In this sense, what urban Aboriginals claim as 'Aboriginal culture' is an urbanised product. At the same time, however, they regard 'Aboriginal culture' as grounds for urban Aboriginals to rely on when identifying themselves as Aboriginal, and as a vehicle to publicise their Aboriginality. From this, it is possible to say that 'Aboriginal culture' in urban settings is an exclusively urban Aboriginal phenomenon, an invention with a clear purpose (see Hobsbawm [1983]).

This invented culture is not only visible but coincides with what both urban Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people regard as 'authentic' Aboriginal. For them, it is both easy to feel and less interfering in their daily lives. Moreover, it surely justifies the very existence of urban Aboriginals, since it is acceptable both to them and the European dominant Australian society.

CONCLUSION

At present, culture learning is an ongoing process. Teaching materials are not fully established, nor teaching methods fully developed. Further more, because Aboriginal culture itself is an imagined product, it is both unfixed and changeable. Even so, culture learning seems to have significant implications. One is that since it is practised by a large number of urban Aboriginals, it naturally generates a sense of solidarity among them. Culture learning helps to bind those who were divided and broken up socially and culturally due to the past

discriminatory policy. Culture learning facilitates a sense of recognition that urban Aboriginals are a people with their own entity, different from non-Aboriginal people and outback Aboriginals, albeit affiliated to the latter in many respects. In that sense, culture learning might lead to the emergence of *Urban Aboriginals* as an entity. This is just like ethnogenesis.

This ethnogenesis in urban settings may appear different from what Attwood maintains in the making of Aboriginals [1989]. In the past, according to Attwood, indigenous people were forcefully exposed to the European way of life, and expected to adjust to it for the ultimate purpose of assimilation into Australian society under the categorical name of Aborigine. Urban Aboriginals, however, are emerging by the self-conscious activity of culture learning. But in nature these two are the same in that people of indigenous ancestry have adapted themselves to the discourse of the dominant society about the indigenous people and their culture. That is, the dominant society has had an image, a very influential one, of what indigenous people should be in society. In the early days, it wanted them to abandon indigenous-ness while now it encourages the same category of people to obtain indigenous-ness. Both meet the demands of the dominant society. So people of indigenous ancestry have had to make themselves what the dominant society (non-Aboriginals) thinks they should be.

Since indigenous people in urban areas have been considered as located marginally in Australian society, and also in the category of Aboriginal, they have been vulnerable to the social atmosphere that has been influential in the formation of the discourse about indigenous people. Because of this, they have had to confirm their existence by reference to such a discourse of the dominant society. In a way, urban indigenous people have been at the mercy of the notion that non-Aboriginals have had about Aboriginals, just as under colonial rule. They have been oscillating between non-Aboriginal oppression and the imagery of Aboriginals based on an illusion of what Aboriginal culture and tradition should be.

This situation cannot be expected to come to an end in the near future. One reason for this is that urban dwellers of indigenous ancestry by and large can find their *raison d'être* by oscillating between non-Aboriginal and outback Aboriginal. That is, they have to be inclined to traditionalism in one way, and to an urbanised or Europeanised way of life in another.

European Australians once discouraged indigenous people by force from maintaining their ancestral culture. At present, they encourage the very same segment of the population to create something unique as a national symbol of Australia by pouring a huge sum of money into reifying multiculturalism. This is nothing but a great irony of history. It is just a beginning, but surely the most favourable condition the indigenous Australians have ever encountered in the 200 years of contact history.

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