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RESPONSE TO EDITORIAL

Aborigine, Indian, Indigenous or first nations?

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> Recognition of a people's fundamental right to self-determination must include the right to self-definition and to be free from the control and manipulation of an alien people. It must include the right to inherit the collective identity of one's people and to transform that identity creatively according to the self-defined aspirations of one's people and one's own generation. It must include the freedom to live outside the cage created by other peoples' images and projections.[1]

In the above, Michael Dodson recognises a crucial point in the reclamation of 'our' definition of and for 'ourselves'. The reclamation can be made carefully through language, yet this reclamation must be localised. The issue with creating a blanket term, such as Aborigine, Indian, Indigenous or First Nation, is reclamation cannot occur if that language and terminology is imposed on the local. This in fact perpetuates the power dynamic between the colonisers and the colonised. Even if 'Indigenous' peoples come up with a term, we would be buying into the metanarratives of an imposed system of language.

It is vital to acknowledge that language and terminology are vehicles for the manifestation of dis- crimination and false (re)presentation. Therefore, language cannot be recognised as an impartial and unproblematic medium and can have real material affect because of its deep links to society and culture. These constructed terminologies are embedded in the metanarratives of western discourse. Martin Nakata suggests that we need to 'Untangle ourselves from colonial histories'.[2] In doing so, we have to understand the motivations of such constructions in concert with subverting the hegemony of our own representations. In her discussion on the notion of Pan-Aboriginality Bronwyn Carlson states:

> Apart from the moral and policy distinctions surrounding separatism as the basis of action, Thiele questioned the assumptions underpinning Tatz's representation of two homogenous groups- Aborigines and Europeans- that preserved the 'them' and 'us' framework and which continued the analysis of relations between the two solely on the basis of race.[3]

A significant act of colonisation is the creation of 'us' and 'them' where terminologies follow. It is true that the words Aborigine, Indian, Indigenous or First Nation are in fact non-'Indigenous'. These constructed terminologies have only been created as the dominant colonial power needs to define itself against something from the past. The notion of the past and the premise of objectivity is crucial in under- standing these terminologies and what they mean for people today. In this act of representation, false consciousness is formed. It is important to put into context a point in history for Australia. Until 1972, when the White Australia Policy was abolished, White Australia excluded Indigenous Australian people by definition. This is vital in understanding how the terms Aboriginal, Aboriginal people, Indigenous or First Australians have come to be. In this way, these terms locate us as timeless, unchanging and a relic of the past. For Nakata and Torres Strait Islanders:

> Theoretically, Islanders were positioned as people from the past who were being catapulted into the present by the presence of intruders into their previously timeless and unchanging lives- not by intruders into their present lives but intruders into their lives of the past.[4]

The powers have a lot to 'say' about us. Since their first intrusive gaze colonising cultures have had a pre- occupation with observing, analysing, studying, classifying and labelling 'Aborigines' and Aboriginality. Terminology is about definition in order to categorise. And in this we are the object of a continual flow of commentary and classification. It is this objectification through language that is additionally problematic. What is significant is how language is coupled with terminologies. For example, in Australia, 'The' Aborigines or 'the' Aboriginal people is problematic as 'the' objectifies subjectivity. Furthermore, the dichotomy between the constructions of 'traditional' and 'Urban' creates restrictions of what we can be defined as in Australia. One, being traditional, is supposedly more 'authentic', whereas urban is a 'hybrid' culture that is lost between the past and the present.

So, it can be agreed that there is little need to contend the point that these supposedly 'objective' definitions are ideological tools designed to assist the State in applying its ideologies of control, dominance and assimilation.

Fundamentally, Indigenous peoples must be accepted according to their own perceptions and conceptions of themselves in relation to 'other' peoples. There must be no attempt to be demarcated according to the views of others through the values of external societies or of the dominant sectors of such societies. The suggestion of a philosophical council concerning itself with problems that terminology brings poses a useful solution. If this council created a framework of best practice, with the provision to localise terminology that is appropriate for the local conditions, then we can follow a structure premised on peoples. It is about creating a best practice framework or model that can be easily contextualised by local conditions. A framework can promote that identity is mutable, interchangeable and according to context, and can differ according to audience. There is a problem with having one definition. According to Nakata:

> The Cultural Interface cannot be viewed then in deterministic ways. It is a space of possibilities as well as constraints, which can have negative or positive consequences for different people at different times.[5]

Creating a framework cannot be deterministic, and needs to recognise that definitions or termi-nologies of peoples is ever moving and continuously 'present'. There exists the problem of using the terms above even in this response. Therefore, for the purpose of this response, I can use the term in Banjalung language to describe 'people' of south Bundjalung Country, *Berrin*. I use *Berrin* to describe 'Indigenous' peoples as a matter of locating them and the term. This is from my position of Country. In any case the argument is to create best practice framework via working through the local. In this way, we collectively reclaim self-definition through the premise of language. This action means that I refuse to enter into the terminology of the dominant and situate the local. Even non-Berrin people can do this, whilst on Country. It not only locates how one is described, but how this description becomes present, not trapped and continuously catapulted into the distant past through constructed terminologies. It postulates that 'we' are always in the here.

Notes

1. https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/end-beginning-redefinding-aboriginality-dodson-1994

2. Nakata (2007), p. 207.

3. Carlson (2016), p. 79.

4. Nakata (2007), p. 201.

5. Nakata (2007), p. 200.

References

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Dodson, M. (1994). *The end in the beginning: Re(de)finding aboriginality* https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/end-beginning-redefining-aboriginality-dodson-1994

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