

July 26, 13:00~14:30: Sophia Symposium, Room 2-1702

Catriona ELDER, Tokyo University, Japan/ University of Sydney, Australia

“Recognising Aboriginal Publics: European Australians Listening Instead of Talking”

Key words

Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal peoples, Reconciliation, race relations

Abstract

As colonized subjects Aboriginal people have a long history of being silenced by mainstream institutions and are provided with few opportunities to tell their own truths. For many decades Aboriginal people were absent from the education system, the bureaucracy, politics and even community groups. As a result their ideas, attitudes and opinions were not heard. If information on the lives of Aboriginal people was needed it was most often provided by European-Australians. Since the late 1960s, and then more insistently since the 1990s Aboriginal peoples have made their way into all aspects of Australian life and their knowledges and ideas are more widely available.

However, when Aboriginal truth telling emerges it tends to be in moments of crisis and the European-Australian public gaze is most frequently brought to bear on their sufferings. So though many times Australians hear from, and about, Aboriginal people when they succeed or are happily discussing literature or sports, it is also the case that more often Aboriginal people become objects or subjects of discussion when things are going badly. So for example, Aboriginal peoples perspectives are sought principally ‘as targets for social services’ (Environics Institute n.d.: 7; Maddison 2012) in areas such as health or for specific interventions. Such moments are important and are often used to leverage economic resources for these communities, but they leave untouched dominant representations of Aboriginal subjects as dystopian or romanticised objects of mainstream stereotypes.

This paper explores one response to Aboriginal people’s suggestion that they be provided with an opportunity to ‘tell it like it is’. The paper outlines a research project between scholars and the Larrakia people of Darwin. Called ‘tell it like it is’ it argues that Aboriginal people are a public whose views are important for the nation as a whole. This paper explores the often ignored understanding that Aboriginal views should be valued in their own right and as everyday opinions, rather than as crisis data. So it is important to let Aboriginal people frame the discussion and set the questions and provide the answers. These issues may or may not be what non-Aboriginal people think are the important ones. However, if Aboriginal people talk then European-Australian people need to listen. So this paper also outlines a methodology that could further enable European Australians in particular to listen to Aboriginal perspectives. This paper explores what it means for an Indigenous public to offer their understanding of European-Australian communities and institutions, but also what it means for European Australians to hear and listen to ideas about them as a specific cultural group.

ELDER, Catriona

ELDER, Catriona is an Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney. She is also just finishing her time as the Visiting Professor in Australian Studies the University of Tokyo. Elder is a cultural historian/sociologist whose work focuses on issues of race, gender, national identity and belonging. A current major project explores the place of Australian television historical drama series in (re)producing narratives of national belonging. A recent publication was an edited book with Keith Moore titled, *New Voices, New Visions: Challenging Australian Identities and Legacies* (CSP 2012) that showcases contemporary scholarship on national identity.

Professor Elder is involved in two collaborative ARC funded projects at the moment. Working with Dr Daphne Habibis, Professor Maggie Walters and Penny Taylor and the Larrakia Corporation in Darwin she is exploring Aboriginal peoples experiences and attitudes to Euro-Australians. The second project focuses on the topic of war and race. Alongside Dr Vicki Grieves and Dr Karen Hughes she is investigating the experiences of children born of interracial sexual relationships in WWII Australia.

Her research interests include whiteness studies, racism and anti-racism, Australian national identity. Current research projects include a collaborative study (Dr Amanda Elliot, USyd) of women, work and social life in Australia in the 1940s-1960s. Dr Elder also works with Dr Cath Ellis and Dr Angela Pratt on reconciliation in contemporary Australia.