

off, as I was, if you are not interested in war or cricket. The writer's skill in spinning truly memorable tales will take you along until you will be fully absorbed.

Elaine Phillips

Member RAHS and volunteer

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Ann McGrath, Laura Rademaker and Jakelin Troy (eds), *Everywhen: Australia and the language of deep history*, NewSouth Publishing, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, NSW, 2022, x + 311 pages; ISBN 9781742237329.

'Everywhen' is a term used by the anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner in his 1956 essay 'The Dreaming'. We read: 'Stanner used it to encapsulate the temporal element of what his teachers, Muta ... and ... Durmugam ... understood as the time of "the Dreaming".'

This book examines various aspects of the Dreaming with an emphasis on time and place, as well as the life experiences of Indigenous Australians and the significance of the Dreaming and Country to them. The book has 12 chapters written by various contributors. The chapters are copiously referenced, there is an index, and there are illustrations as needed by the text. The chapters are diverse, and include discussions of the notion of 'Country', Australian languages and what they can and cannot tell us about time and cultural concepts, the effects of a focus on technological change and assumed

notions of progress in archaeological investigation, Yawuru cosmology, language and notions of time in the Groote Eylandt archipelago, cultural interaction between missionaries and Aboriginal communities, songs, and narrative practices.

Some chapters are very approachable while others, such as those on linguistics, are more technically demanding but rewarding close reading. There has been an effort to make the more technical chapters accessible to the general reader. An aim of the book is to 'stimulate a conversation about the languages of time across traditions and cultures, within and beyond the academy'.

An important aspect of the Dreaming, or *jukurrpa*, is that the ancestral beings whose activities created the world continue to be present in their creation and can be observed and experienced through landforms and natural observation. This gives a heightened meaning to the term 'Country', it expresses a deep historical connection between a remote past and the present – the past becomes deeply embedded in the present and remains alive and sustaining, continuing into the future and giving a spiritual and metaphysical dimension to life, as mentioned by several contributors.

In Western thinking, the past typically may have had an effect on the present, but the common attitude is that the past does not infuse our thoughts and perceptions. In more recent times, public tradition and historical awareness are being eroded by technological

change, a marked individualism, and an unrestrained notion of freedom. The feeling behind Shannon Foster's comment 'to know tomorrow we must first know yesterday' has little resonance in wider Australian attitudes except at a literal and superficial level. In the West, the past generally has little transcending, spiritual or metaphysical significance, except within aspects of a diminished Christian religious observance.

The *Dreaming* brings the past into the present and the future, and so can contribute to a perception that the 'ordinary' concept of time as linear does not exist in Indigenous thought, thus erasing apparent crucial distinctions between the past, present and future. However, while it is easy to lapse into what Marie-Eve Ritz and Maïa Ponsonnet call the 'exoticisation and mystification' of concepts of time in the face of cultural difference, they caution against the over-emphasising of difference where there is also commonality, especially as uninformed responses to difference can hinder cross-cultural understanding and produce social effects of exclusion. As they say: 'It does not follow... that people who embrace such representations [of time] also experience time differently at a narrower, phenomenological scale.'

Laura Rademacher also expresses a wariness of 'schema that would suggest Aboriginal people experience time as entirely different from Europeans'. Romanticising the exotic is something to be on guard against, in that the feeling of superficial pleasure it may induce can contain an implicit condescension that

prevents a genuine understanding of difference. Understanding of another culture arises neither only, nor even primarily, from facts about that culture, but from grasping its spirit. It is all too easy for 'the different' to become simply a forgettable 'other'. A challenge for wider Australia is to grasp the spirit of Aboriginal culture and to recognise its complexity and internal diversity.

The book is suggestive of further issues. One is the effect that possession or non-possession of a written language may have upon a cultural tradition and thought. Another is the commonalities of Indigenous and Western thought. Isaac Newton wrote that one of the rules for scientific investigation is an assumption of 'the consonance of nature with itself', and it may not be too much to suggest that the *Dreaming* can be thought of as an ontological vision in human terms of the 'consonance of the world with itself'. There is also the question of how differing cultures deal with distinctions between culture and knowledge.

This is a recommended and important book for the understanding of Indigenous culture and ways of thought. It considers Indigenous culture in itself, but also in the context of a forced and hostile occupation of Indigenous lands, and it is suggestive of ways to develop what differing cultures may have to offer each other.

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