

Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives

edited by Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent and Tiffany Shellam

xv + 205 pp., ANU Press, Canberra, 2015,
ISBN 9781925022766 (pbk), \$43.00.

Brokers & Boundaries: Colonial Exploration in Indigenous Territory

edited by Tiffany Shellam, Maria Nugent, Shino Konishi
and Allison Cadzow

xiii + 212 pp., ANU Press, Canberra, 2016,
ISBN 9781760460112 (pbk), \$36.00.

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It is sobering to realise that a generation has passed since Henry Reynolds's ground-breaking work *With the White People*, tellingly subtitled 'the crucial role of Aborigines in the exploration and development of Australia', was published. Building on earlier research into race relations and frontier expansion across Australia, in *With the White People* Reynolds specifically engaged with the vital importance of, and multifaceted roles played by, Aboriginal people in the white exploration and colonisation of Australia. Until recently, very little scholarly work on Indigenous intermediaries or cultural brokers in an Australian context has emerged to build on Reynolds's foundations.

Fortunately, two extensive new resources were recently published following the 'Local Intermediaries in International Exploration' conference at The Australian National University in July 2013. The first of these two new edited volumes has a particular focus on innovative methodological approaches to uncovering the 'hidden histories' of Indigenous intermediaries, while the

second volume focuses more closely on Indigenous 'brokering' and boundary crossing. Both volumes have a geographical focus on the wider Australian region, extending well beyond Papua to as far away as Tahiti.

Indigenous Intermediaries opens with a chapter co-authored by the editors in which they chart a shift since the 1990s towards 'a more complex and multivocal account of the practices and politics of European exploration'. The intermediaries referred to in the title are explained as being 'professional guides or other labourers who accompanied expeditions'. One of several really interesting facets of this edited collection is its emphasis on methodological innovation. The editors and contributing authors are conscious of aiming to go beyond simply replacing accounts of white heroic explorers with similarly constructed accounts of Indigenous people. Instead, their foci are the nuances and complexities of encounters, journeys, and aftermaths.

Nine chapters follow. Felix Driver examines key issues around how we think about actors and relationships, sensitivity to politics of naming, and a need to 'tread a fine line between ... salvage biography and critical history'. The next three chapters focus on Australia, beginning with Catherine Bishop and Richard White's exploration of historical memory and popular celebrity in relation to expeditions. Bishop and White usefully posit four periods in what they have termed the 'cycle of celebrity'. Maria Nugent's engaging, forensic account of Jacky Jacky's narrative of his expedition with Kennedy to Cape York highlights how it is 'at moments of crisis that Indigenous people become visible in records of exploration'. Nugent highlights the importance of adopting sophisticated interpretive approaches that take into account processes and performances when reading exploratory records. Traversing New South Wales and Western Australia, Tiffany Shellam draws into her discussion the sometimes overlooked elements of encounter between Indigenous intermediaries and 'strangers' encountered by expeditionary parties, referring to these as 'histories from between'.

The following four chapters focus on Oceania. Bronwen Douglas traces evidence of Indigenous 'auxiliaries' from the recorded start of European exploration in Oceania from 1511 through to the nineteenth century, focusing on several personalities from the latter. She examines the roles of Indigenous peoples as co-producers of knowledge about Oceania. Acquisition of knowledge, particularly in the field of natural history, is the focus of John Gascoigne's chapter where he argues that Europeans valued Indigenous knowledge more highly in earlier phases of encounter rather than later when European systems of scientific knowledge were rising to the fore. Harriet Parsons offers a new reading of Tupaia's artworks on Cook's *Endeavour*, suggesting they afford glimpses into creative collaborations between Pacific peoples and the British. Antje Lübcke

then explores the relationships between photographers and their subjects in 1885 in New Guinea. She demonstrates how the success of such ventures was dependent on local participation and expertise.

The final chapter in *Indigenous Intermediaries* is a fascinating conversation between Len Collard and Dave Palmer in which Collard acts as an intermediary between Palmer and the 'old people', engaging with the ways in which the latter interpreted explorers' journals and white incursions onto country.

Brokers and Boundaries recasts exploration as 'a collective effort'. Shino Konishi's chapter explores parallels in the lives of two high-profile Aboriginal cultural brokers in early colonial New South Wales, Bennelong and Gogy. She demonstrates how both men leveraged off the presence of newcomers to enhance their own status and power within their Indigenous societies. Nicole Starbuck then examines early nineteenth-century French and Papuan encounters, demonstrating how the former oscillated between essentialising the latter and describing them 'with ... admiration'. She also charts a shift in the balance of power, with Papuans becoming more astute traders over time. Mark Dunn's focus is on Indigenous guides in New South Wales's Hunter Valley between 1818 and 1830. He demonstrates how their role was crucial to early European expansion into the region. Unusually, Aboriginal women are the subjects of Allison Cadzow's chapter. She draws on the experiences of Dray, who guided Conciliator of Aborigines George Augustus Robinson in Van Diemen's Land and Turandurey, guide to surveyor general Thomas Mitchell in New South Wales, in the 1830s to offer an interpretation of 'women's actions in their own social and cultural contexts'. Clint Bracknell utilises the story of Noongar man Bobby Roberts in Western Australia to highlight how Aboriginal people were active agents pursuing their own interests when collaborating with explorers but with 'decreasingly limited options' over time. Roberts's shifting subject positions amply illustrate Bracknell's points.

Dario Di Rosa explores the fascinating roles played by Torres Strait Islanders in mediating 'from afar' European encounters with Papuans in the 1840s. Later in the same century, in 1890 and 1891, the British Administrator of New Guinea William MacGregor visited the Trobriand Islands. Andrew Connelly examines how bodies of knowledge acquired by local chiefs through earlier visits by whalers and such like informed their reception of MacGregor and their management of relationships with him. Chris Ballard's chapter rounds off this collection with a focus on explorers who travelled into New Guinea's interior between 1872 and 1928. He charts a series of stages that were accompanied by transformations in relationships between European explorers and local peoples. He concludes with an apt rhetorical question: '... who amongst us – is not an intermediary in someone else's narrative?'

This text is taken from *Aboriginal History, Volume 40, 2016*,
edited by Liz Conor, published 2016 by ANU Press,
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.