"White journeys into black country"

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Abstract

Oral history and archival research into the life stories of two whitefellas, Rebecca Froebs and Jim Page, who came to live in the Adnyamathanha community of the Northern Flinders Ranges in the 1920’s, hint at the significance of their journeys from England to Australia, and from the east coast of Australia to the inland.

This paper addresses the meanings of these journeys within the context of these two lives, and within the context of contemporary colonial discourses of journey. It argues that the journeys inland and into indigenous community life more significantly contribute to personal transformation, than the initial journey from England to Australia. It also argues that while the metaphor of journey in Australia has been explored for its references to Biblical themes including Expulsion, Exodus and Exile, the meaning of the metaphor that best describes the experience in the subjects’ lives is that explored by ‘wild white men’ thought to have ‘gone native’ in Australia after journeying inland.

Journeys by white immigrants into inland areas and indigenous communities can also be interpreted through indigenous meanings attached to the metaphor of journey, and through indigenous oral histories recording the arrival of these subjects in their midst. Drawing on Adnyamathanha interpretations, the metaphor of journey conveys notions of the creation of country, people and law, as well as notions drawn from experiences of colonisation, and based on the biblical theme of ‘being sent’ by God.

Drawing on these various meanings of the metaphor of journey, the author has constructed narratives of the subjects’ journeys, using conventional forms to record the subjects’ experiences, and interpretations made by others.