

The Cadence of Proximity: Indigenous Resilience as Caring for Country-in-the-City

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Abstract : Caring for Country (Ngurrain Dharug language) is core to Aboriginal identity, Law/Lore, practice, and resilience within the continent called 'Australia'. It is the basis of thousands of years of sustainability. However, when Ngurra is a city known as Sydney, due to 235 years of colonial impact, caring for the Country is limited, being controlled by the State and private ownership of the land title. Recent research indicates that localised Indigenous activism is most successful when community members are geographically proximate to the presences and places of connection, caring, and belonging. This article frames these findings through the cadence that proximity provides. This presentation is centred on the proximate agency that is being exercised by Dharug community through three significant sites within the Sydney basin. Those sites include, firstly, Shaw's Creek Aboriginal Place, at the foot of the Blue Mountains in far western Sydney. Second inclusion is the site of Blacktown Native Institution, that was the part of the authoritarian colonial governance of British Governor Lachlan Macquarie (after who Macquarie University is named), which saw the beginnings of the removal of children from their families and culture to 'civilize' them. The third site is that of the so-called Brown's Waterhole in the State government administered Lane Cove National Park. Each of these sites is being activated through Dharug and, more broadly, Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing, and being. These ways involve the land, water, wind, and star-based ecologies interwoven with traditional transgenerational storytelling of the presences (Ancestral and spiritual) creating them. Activations include, but are not limited to, the return of cultural fire for reviving plants, soils, animals, and birds. These fire practices have traditionally been at the basis of sustainable, regenerative biodiversity. These practices involve the literacy of reading Ngurra and the seasonal interactions across the ecologies. Together, they both care for the Country and support humanity, and have done so across thousands of years. However, when the cost of real-estate and rental accommodation prevents community members from being able to live on Dharug Ngurra when bureaucratic governance restricts and/or excludes traditional custodial relationships, and when private treaty land title destroys the presences and places while disconnecting people from their Ancestral practices, it becomes clear that caring for Country is only possible when the community can afford to live nearby. Recognising the cadence of proximity as the agency that underpins caring for Country-in-the-city, sustainable change opportunities don't have to only focus on regional and remote areas. Urban-based Aboriginal relationality offers an alternative to the unsustainable practices that underpin human-centric disconnection. Weaving Indigenous cadence offers opportunities for sustainable futures even when facing the extremes of climate changing catastrophes.

Keywords : australian aboriginal, biocultural knowledges, climate change, dharug ngurra, sustainability, resilience

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