Binan Goonj—Bridging Cultures in Aboriginal Health (3rd edition)


This 3rd edition of Binan Goonj represents the experiences and perspectives of Eckermann, Dowd, Chong, Nixon, Gray, and Johnson on research and government reports on Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal Health over 19 years of collaboration.

In the Introduction, the authors have written that people in Health [in Australia] cannot begin to understand Aborigine peoples’ health situation without becoming aware of their history since invasion.

Therefore, Eckermann et al strip the philosophical, historical, social, political, cultural, and economic ‘onion’ on colonisation, genocide, and racism since Captain Cook ‘discovered’ and claimed Australia for the British Crown.

Yet, there is only a feeble attempt by the authors, on page 163, to stir the readers’ awareness of the significance and usefulness of the groups of Aborigine peoples’ languages [and cultures] to living well with each other and with others on the cattle station and the reserve, in the mission and the urban centre.

The ‘Aboriginal’ problem [in Health], according to the authors, lies in the history that the non-Aboriginal British and the western European colonisers simply took over the so called ‘empty continent’ [Terra Nullius] and the responsibility fell on the Aborigine peoples to shape up to the invaders’ violence and perception of civilisation, to accept without question their new position of subjugated peoples in their own country. The niche or subjugated position, of course, was, and still is, largely defined by the more powerful non-Aboriginal majority. This early contact set the ethic—colonisation, genocide, and institutionalised history of subjugation—for the present position of Aboriginal peoples in Health and Australian society.

After 195 pages, Eckermann et al dash to finish the book, and the authors end the volume with several Case Studies illustrating the very significant history of Empowerment in Aboriginal Health.

Do the authors convey what is promised in the subtitle? In a word, no. Is the book worth reading? Unquestionably.

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