

Noah Riseman

Geoff Rodoreda, Eva Bischoff (eds.): *Mabo's Cultural Legacy: History, Literature, Film and Cultural Practice in Contemporary Australia*

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It has been thirty years since the High Court of Australia handed down its momentous 'Mabo' ruling, overturning the doctrine of terra nullius and recognising the existence of native title rights in the Meriam Islands and, by extension, Australia. The ruling revolutionised the teaching and understanding of Australian history and generated a wave of scholarship through the end of the 1990s about native title and the effects of the ruling on Australian society. Since the 2000s, it has primarily been historians and legal scholars writing about 'Mabo' and native title, while explicit engagement with the topic has been less common in other disciplines. As Indigenous affairs have turned to other issues ranging from the apology to the Stolen Generations through to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Mabo and native title have fallen into the background.

Geoff Rodoreda and Eva Bischoff's edited collection 'Mabo's Cultural Legacy' reconceptualises the impact of the 'Mabo' ruling, taking as a starting point that the effects of 'Mabo' have been omnipresent in Australia since 1992. The contributions from anthropology, linguistics, history, literary studies, cultural studies and cinema studies analyse different legacies of 'Mabo' in Australian legal and cultural life. The authors are a mix of Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars from Australia and Europe. The book is structured in five sections: Making History; Mabo in Politics and Practice; Mabo and Film; Fiction and Poetry; and Mabo and Memoir. Although all chapters make reference to 'Mabo' and/or native title, the extent to which the authors directly engage with Bonita and Eddie Koiki Mabo, the court ruling or native title vary. Yet, what unites them is how they all discuss sovereignty, co-existence and living Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

In the first chapter, Lynette Russell and Rachel Standfield explore how the 'Mabo' ruling was not a beginning, but the culmination of over a century of Indigenous activism. They show examples from Victoria dating back to the Koorie occupation of Coranderrk in the mid-1800s of how Aboriginal people have consistently asserted sovereignty, framed through the legal and political discourses available to them at the time. Paul Turnbull's chapter focuses on how both Eddie Koiki Mabo and his wife Bonita worked with Black community education programs in 1970s far north Queensland. They also link the Mabos' work with that of other activists like Joe McGinness and the trade union movement to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander activism and education initiatives.

The history section thus highlights the 'Mabo' ruling not as a change so much as yet another step on a long journey towards Indigenous rights and shared sovereignty.

The two chapters in the second part of the book are more focused on some of the practical operations and challenges around the 'Native Title Act'. Carsten Wergin discusses the overlapping native title claims from different Kimberley mobs and how they played out in a series of native title proceedings in 2017. His analysis discusses different mobs' meanings of connection to country – be it as occupiers, inheritors or custodians – and how the court arbitrated their native title claims – ultimately rejecting custodianship in favour of occupation. Christina Ringel's chapter shows how linguists have played roles in native title claims. She gives examples of how changing language and references to place have contributed to successful native title recognition in certain remote communities. Wergin and Ringel's chapters both show the limits of native title legislation and the messiness of trying to fit complex Indigenous understandings of country, language and culture into a Western legal framework.

The section on film has three chapters which highlight transformations in Indigenous Australian television and cinema since the 1990s. Romaine Moreton and Therese Davis describe the rise of Indigenous film units within the Australian Film Commission and SBS and how, over the thirty years since the 'Mabo' ruling, film production companies have evolved their policies and practices to encourage Indigenous filmmaking and ownership. They express Indigenous filmmaking as a form of asserting sovereignty which became possible only because 'Mabo' compelled the ABC, SBS, the Australian Film Corporation and other production companies to step up their efforts around Indigenous participation and ownership. Renate Brosch's chapter analyses two filmic representations of Eddie Koiki Mabo's life from 1997 and 2012 respectively and how the latter shows him occupying a role within both Indigenous and Australian cultures. Brosch uses the word hybridity and the argument ties to the broader theme of Indigenous people's belonging in two worlds. Peter Kilroy describes the rise of a Torres Strait Islander screen culture in the 2000s and how production companies and actors have worked to produce homegrown, Torres Strait Islander cinema and television. All of these chapters show significant transformations over thirty years which have empowered Indigenous filmmaking. They all argue that these are legacies of the 'Mabo' ruling because it ushered in a newfound appreciation and *necessity* for Indigenous ownership and development of film.

Section four's focus on literature begins with a chapter by Philip Morrissey about Melissa Lucashenko's novel 'Mullumbimby'. He discusses how the novel explores Aboriginal identity and connection through the three principal characters and how different ways of being Aboriginal can become messily intertwined with native title claims. Dorothee Klein's chapter explores Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of conceiving and belonging to land in Kim Scott's novel 'That Deadman Dance'. It highlights how 'Mabo' forced Australians to recognise and rethink Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connections to country as more than just about ownership, but rather to be a holistic, spiritual belonging. Aboriginal and Australian law are the subject of Katrin Althans' chapter, using

the book 'Lightning Mine' to imagine ways that Aboriginal jurisprudence could (or should) be recognised in native title claims. Finally, Lioba Schreyer explores how Indigenous poetry plays on the themes of terra nullius and history to show that it has always been a lie and Indigenous sovereignty has always been present. A theme permeating all of these chapters is how native title claims often subvert Aboriginal law to Australian/white law, but this does not *need* to be the case; there can and should be room for coexistence. Moreover, they emphasise Aboriginal understandings of connection to country – that which both 'Mabo' and the 'Native Title Act' (supposedly) attempted to recognise yet has proven challenging to implement in practice under the dominant Western legal system.

The final section on memoir begins with a chapter by Lars Jensen which focuses on Aboriginal journalist Stan Grant's second autobiography 'Talking to My Country'. This chapter is more contemporary-focused and uses Grant's book to explore the ongoing unwillingness of non-Indigenous Australians to embrace Indigenous belonging and sovereignty in the thirty years since 'Mabo' – particularly highlighted in the former Coalition government's rejection of the Uluru Statement of the Heart. The final chapter by Kieran Dolin gives examples of Indigenous memoirs written in the 2000s-10s and how they represent trauma and searches for Indigenous healing through justice. Both of these chapters reflect attempts to find a place for Indigenous Australians within contemporary Australia, but how Indigenous people consistently run up against intractable governments and systems which refuse to engage with Indigenous people on their own cultural terms.

The essays in 'Mabo's Cultural Legacy' are disparate, but there are some common themes across the book. One is that sovereignty was never ceded and instead can, should, and does coexist in Australia. Indeed, as the editors point out in the introduction, the 'Mabo' ruling may have seemed revolutionary, but it was actually rather conservative because it did not disrupt the status quo in Australia. The 1996 'Wik' native title ruling further cemented the notion of coexistence, and these chapters all reflect Indigenous assertions of sovereignty and co-existence within Australia. Yet, they highlight that Indigenous desires for co-existence have consistently met opposition in law, history and politics – though Indigenous authors, filmmakers, journalists and activists continue to imagine a different way forward.

The essays also flip the famous adage from Justice Olney in the Yorta Yorta Native Title Ruling about the tide of history washing away Indigenous connections to country. Instead, the authors all show that the tide of history is Indigenous because the novels, poetry, films and histories presented all show ongoing Indigenous connections to country and law. It is this big picture that the edited collection highlights: 'Mabo' made the omnipresence of Indigenous people and culture visible and unignorable – but it was nothing new for Indigenous people. They were always here, as was their law, sovereignty and connection to country.

The extent to which the chapters link to the 'Mabo' ruling vary, with some being obvious and others expressing tenuous links. The book does, however, have a clear focus on assertions of Indigenous sovereignty and culture in the post-Mabo era – how culture is 'used' in native title claims, how culture has been *expressed*

through native title claims, and how cultural artefacts *manifest* Indigenous sovereignty and living cultures. 'Mabo's Cultural Legacy' is a thought-provoking collection worth a read, and I must admit it left me with one lingering question: Have Indigenous framings of law, sovereignty and connections to land changed post-'Mabo', or are we the settlers just now starting to listen? That's a question for another edited collection to answer.