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## Diasporic Indigeneity: place and the articulation of Ainu identity in Tokyo, Japan

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**Abstract.** Representations of Indigenous people as rooted and sedentary reinforce ideas of their presence in cities as strange and out of place. This is problematic. In a world where an increasing number if not majority of Indigenous people live in urban or metropolitan areas, cities are now critical sites of Indigenous negotiation, appropriation, marginalization, and emplacement. This paper opens up the analysis of urban Indigenous life from the perspective of place and its role in the articulation of urban Indigenous identities. It takes as a case study the situation of indigenous Ainu in and around Tokyo. The interrogation of place highlights how Ainu are socially active in the city and critiques the regionalization of Ainu affairs to northern Japan.

### **Introduction: Ainu in the city**

Ten years ago, Portes et al (1999, page 217) spoke of transnational migration having finally acquired the “critical mass and complexity necessary to speak of an emergent social field.” Since then, movement as a unit of study has continued to pervade all areas and aspects of cultural analysis to the extent that in 2006 Sheller and Urry heralded a ‘new mobilities’ paradigm emergent within the social sciences. In light of demographics that suggest more Indigenous<sup>(1)</sup> people now live in urban centers than on traditional lands, one would expect the issue of urban migration and mobility to occupy a prominent position within the Indigenous studies and migration literature. However, while the rest of the world is on the move, political representations would have us believe Indigenous peoples remain motionless—steadfast in both time and space. This is highly problematic. As an issues paper drafted for the Expert Workshop on Indigenous Peoples and Migration held in Geneva in April 2006<sup>(2)</sup> states:

“Although there is a growing body of information on global levels, trends and patterns of migration, the dynamics of Indigenous peoples’ migration and the extent to which Indigenous populations and their communities are affected by migration are not known. This information is crucial in devising migration policies that are comprehensive and that address the needs and perspectives of all segments of the population.”

It should come as no surprise that the migration of Indigenous peoples to and back from the cities of the world represents one of the most important yet most underreported issues facing Indigenous societies. As the Native American scholar Fixico notes, the fact of there now being more Native peoples in North America living in cities than on reserves “is a revelation to many people who still believe the stereotypes about Indians” (2001, page ix).

<sup>(1)</sup>In agreement with the *Oxford Guide to Canadian English Usage* (2007, page 316), I capitalize ‘Indigenous’ throughout as a means of standardizing its usage alongside Aboriginal peoples and Native Americans.

<sup>(2)</sup>The paper is online at [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session\\_crp5\\_migration.doc](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_crp5_migration.doc)

The state of the matter is this: the same critical attention afforded sedentarism, which has normalized fixity and stability in social theory and made strange mobility and change (Sheller and Urry, 2006, pages 208–212), has done little to challenge the idea of urban Indigenous migration as a simple (if unfortunate) effect of physical dispossession/displacement and political marginalization. Most people still regard the steady influx of Indigenous people into urban centers as the inevitable outcome of neoliberal pressures on rural localities and the ‘pull’ of transnational urbanism. Once indigenous people are in the city, sedentarist theory assumes, the connection with the land—the fundamental precept of Indigenous life—is lost and along with it the authenticity of the migrant’s cultural identity. Indigenous people simply cannot be Indigenous in the city.

Whilst a critical if little referenced literature quite rightly contests this assimilationist model of Indigenous urbanism from the point of view of lived experience (for example, Blackhawk, 1995; Fienup-Riordan, 2000, pages 151–182; Lobo and Peters, 2001), the ‘incarceration’ of Indigenous peoples to place, as Appadurai (1988) puts it, nevertheless continues to inform and shape public and political opinion around the world. This reality is no more clearly seen, I contend, than in Japan.

### **Ainu in Japan**

Images of Japan as ethnically homogeneous and monolingual are features of nationalist ideology that efface a markedly pluri-ethnic/cultural and multilingual society (Graburn et al, 2007; Lie, 2001; Willis and Murphy-Shigematsu, 2007). Alongside the ethnic diversity of, amongst others, Chinese (Vasishth, 1997), Brazilian (Tsuda, 2003), and Korean minorities (Ryang, 2000), there are two prominent Indigenous peoples in Japan, the Ainu and Ryūkyūans. Whereas the Ryūkyū people populate the southern island chain of Okinawa (see Hook and Siddle, 2003), Ainu—the focus of this paper—are a hunter-gatherer people historically connected to the lands, rivers, mountains, and islands of the northern Japanese archipelago.

Traditionally, Ainu territory stretched from the Tōhoku region (northern Honshū) across the northern island of Hokkaidō to Sakhalin and the Kuril Island chain. From 1872 on, the Japanese government undertook a comprehensive strategy to relocate and assimilate Ainu and to strengthen the northern borders of the nation in a bid to protect it from Russian incursion. This entailed the passing of a range of stringent colonialist measures. These included the banning of the Ainu language and the practice of traditional cultural events, the removal of Ainu from communal lands, and various attempts at Japanization by turning Ainu from hunter-gatherers into agriculturalists and laborers for the coastal fisheries. These legislative strategies culminated in 1899 with the passing of the Hokkaidō Former Natives Protection Act (*Hokkaidō Kyūdojin Hogohō*). At this time, economic and social hardships overwhelmed most Ainu communities and the assimilation of Ainu into Japanese society became a reality. Indeed, throughout the 20th century, the enduring legacies of social and political disenfranchisement helped to normalize in popular Japanese discourse the idea of Ainu as an already dead or ‘dying race’ (*horobiyoku minzoku*).

In spite of a long and difficult history of assimilation and subjugation, Ainu survive today. In fact, according to the most recent seven-yearly survey conducted in 2006 by the Hokkaidō Utari Association—the largest Ainu organization—the official population stands at 23 782. Whilst this limited demographic base may seem rather insignificant in comparison with the Japanese national population, its marginality directly informs historical and social Ainu claims to Indigenous status vis-à-vis the experiences of other peoples elsewhere. Yet, it is important to point out that the limitations of this figure also raise questions concerning the historical geography and identity of Ainu, which require closer analysis.

### New Ainu geographies: migration and urbanization

The 20th century became a critical era for the (post)colonial transformation of Ainu society (Siddle, 1996). In the late 1960s Ainu issues underwent a political resurgence. Ainu leaders such as Kayano Shigeru (1926–2006) began to energize a cultural revitalization movement that eventually led to the government's repeal of the Protection Act and the passing of an Ainu Cultural Promotion Act<sup>(3)</sup> (hereafter CPA) in 1997. During the same thirty-year period, Ainu became recognized members of the international Indigenous peoples' movement. Indeed, the Ainu campaign for government recognition of their Indigenous rights—as laid out in the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) to which Japan was a signatory—reached a historic milestone in June 2008 when both Lower and Upper Houses of national parliament accorded the Ainu Indigenous status.

Despite such progress, which is for all intents and purposes truly historic, the representation of modern Ainu life remains firmly fixed within the confines of the traditional landscape of Hokkaidō. In the international arena, the main image of Ainu is of the '(post-)hunter-gatherer people of rural Hokkaidō'. Indeed, the term *Ainu Mosir* (meaning 'land of humans') in the Ainu language is commonly thought to be synonymous with the borders of Hokkaidō, which serve to circumscribe the Ainu 'homeland'. Yet this picture is to the detriment of a large number of Ainu who now live in urban centers on the mainland.

Whilst statistics are available for Ainu in and around Tokyo, they speak to how difficult it is to quantify the exact number of Ainu living outside of Hokkaidō. Notwithstanding continuing debate over the definition of Ainu, unique circumstances from social marginalization to institutionalized discrimination have made being or identifying with Ainu a complicated proposition. Historically, these dynamics have directly affected the collation of accurate demographic data. At the time of writing, for example, Ainu do not appear in the national census and as a result of the prefectural jurisdiction of social welfare budgets, *non-Hokkaidō* Ainu are excluded from the Hokkaidō Utari Association's 'official' population statistic noted above. Nevertheless, two (Tokyo government funded) surveys of the socioeconomic conditions of Ainu in the capital are available (Tokyo-to Kikaku Chōseikyoku Chōsabu, 1975; Tokyo-to Kikaku Shingitsu, 1988). The first, conducted in 1974, found 679 respondents self-identifying as Ainu. The second, in 1988, reported the population to be 2699. In lieu of any survey since, Ainu estimate the figure to have increased to 5000. If correct, this statistic would account for approximately 17% of the Ainu population. Indeed, based on the prevalent problem of undercounting in the formulation of urban Indigenous statistics and mounting anecdotal evidence within Japan, Umesao Tadao, founding president of the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, is one of a growing number who suggests that probably more Ainu today live outside of Hokkaidō than within it (Umesao and Ishii, 1999, page 219).

In parallel to histories of Indigenous peoples in other cities around the world, what I contend in this paper is that the modern geography of Ainu life actually reflects a much more complex story of dislocation, migration, and urbanization than the standard, sedentary frame of reference of Ainu identity and society allows for. The confinement or 'incarceration' of Ainu to Hokkaidō fails to do justice to the very real issues that Ainu face in the cities. Therefore, I argue in relation to the broader field of Indigenous studies that the dominant conception of Ainu culture and history up until this point has ostensibly reproduced a familiar narrative of Indigeneity

<sup>(3)</sup>This was entitled in full, 'The Law for the Promotion of the Ainu Culture and for the Dissemination and Advocacy for the Traditions of the Ainu and the Ainu Culture' (*Ainu bunka shinkō narabi ni Ainu no dentō nado ni kansuru chishiki no fukyū oyobi keihatsu ni kansuru*

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focused on the colonization and expropriation of Ainu life *in* Hokkaidō that all too readily regionalizes and restricts Ainu issues to the geographical boundaries of northern Japan. Such regionalization detracts from understanding emergent forms of Ainu cultural identity that appear outside of the traditional homeland. It is important to note that, whilst urban Ainu life also incorporates the cities of Sapporo and Asahikawa in Hokkaido and other major cities on the mainland such as Nagoya and Osaka, for the purposes of this study it is the situation of Ainu in the nation's capital and the surrounding region of Kantō that I will focus on.

In the first section, I look at what makes urban Indigeneity in general such a difficult proposition and how 'places' are inextricably linked to the articulation of Indigenous identities in cities. Place and the idea of Indigenous emplacement in cities have not been adequately addressed by researchers thus far. Place, to follow Casey (1993), is integral to how we as human beings understand and negotiate our social identities. Place is, as Escobar (2001, page 143) puts it, "more an event than a thing... characterized [more] by openness than by a unitary self-identity." This gets at how places and the people who create them are always already linked to other people and places through translocal networks (both physical and symbolic), kinship systems, and other affiliations. In this way, I do not refer to place as a static geographical location or objective fact; rather, I align myself with the growing consensus in the social sciences (see Escobar, 2001) and regard it as a social construction and *relational* site, a 'meeting-up' point of social relations as Massey (1999) infers.

When I talk of Indigenous emplacement in the city, therefore, I am talking not about isolation away from traditional homelands but about extensions refiguring the social and political geography of Indigenous life. In taking this approach from an Ainu perspective, I focus in the second part of this paper on three sites of urban social interaction in particular. The first is the Rera Cise, a restaurant run by Ainu which serves Ainu food in Nakano ward in western Tokyo. The second is a government-funded Ainu Cultural Exchange Center located just a couple of minutes walk from Tokyo station in central Tokyo. Third, there is the Kantō region itself, where a variety of Ainu social events, ceremonies, or performances are held throughout the year. This place-based approach, I contend, can provide important insights into how Ainu society and the community in Tokyo operates and reproduces itself over time. I conclude with thoughts on the future of urban mainland Ainu society and demonstrate the need for more focused research on the situation of Indigenous peoples in the world's cities.

### **Urban Indigeneity: conceptual perspectives**

It is important to recognize how the situation of Ainu in Tokyo proffers an immediate conceptual critique. It rethinks the binary relationship between '(urban) settler' and '(rural) tribe', in which the representation of Ainu politics and history has been traditionally couched, to challenge the received orthodoxies, propagated by both Ainu and the general public alike, of 'Indigeneity' as a natural concept of social and cultural Otherness tied to a geographical locale (Sissons, 2005, pages 82–83). Within Japan, this sense of Otherness accrues its capital from highly politicized but, nevertheless, powerful images of Ainu cultural authenticity tied inextricably to the landscape of Hokkaidō. Similar representations of Indigenous peoples appear elsewhere in the world. In this era of the international campaign for Indigenous rights, a set of normalized discursive frames has come to the fore that emphasizes the unique relationships Indigenous peoples maintain with spatially discrete environments. It is this notion of Indigenous emplacement within rural, peripheral areas that Lee suggests is the defining characteristic of modern day Indigenous claims to a unique, political identity. He writes:

“the most compelling feature that sets Indigenous people apart is *their sense of place*. The vast majority of citizens in the countries of the metropole are migrants, removed from their ancestral homelands by ocean crossings or rural-to-urban migration, or both, and these urbanites often remain highly mobile within their own nation-states. This mobility and other permanent dislocations so characteristic of advanced capitalism in the era of flexible accumulation reproduces chronic conditions of anomie and stress. What Indigenous people appear to have is what migrants and the children of migrants (i.e. most of the rest of us) feel they lack: a sense of belonging, a sense of rootedness in place. It is this longing to belong that has become one of the most valued ideological commodities in the era of late capitalism” (Lee, 2006, page 450, original italics).

Now, whilst I do not devalue or argue against Lee’s main point that Indigenous societies and the identities of their members often extend through a spectrum of social, cultural, and spiritual relationships with the surrounding environment, the implicit connotation that, by leaving their traditional homelands, ‘they’ (the Indigenous ‘Other’) become like ‘us’ (‘most of the rest’) over time—dislocated, uncultured, mobile, “postcultural citizens” as Rosaldo (1993, page 209) puts it—is an utter misnomer which fails to address the complex dynamics and dimensions of urban Indigenous mobility and migration. It also ignores the lived experiences of Indigenous people in urban areas and the history of urban Indigenous movements which frame new formations and expressions of Indigenous politics and sociality over time. From this standpoint, Indigenous migration to, and residence in, urban areas, does not signify the disappearance of Indigenous life but, rather, characterizes its social, geographical, and political ‘extension’ (Fienup-Riordan, 2000; Fogel-Chance, 1993). In other words, and in coming back to the focus of this paper, urbanization does not augur the end to Ainu life; rather, it signals the end to our *idea* of Ainu.<sup>(4)</sup>

#### **Place and the construction of Indigenous identities**

This ‘idea’ to which I refer concerns the absolute conflation of Ainu identity with the Hokkaidō landscape and is one example of the broader hypostatization of local Indigenous culture with place put forward by the international Indigenous rights movement. In the collective bid to secure land rights and access to traditional resources, Indigenous peoples the world over have appropriated place and its essentialist representation as a strategic ploy in an otherwise limited arsenal of resistance against national governments and multinational corporations.

Whilst this primordial connection between identity and place may, at one level, seem a politically necessary representation of Indigenous society, it simultaneously creates a number of problems from the perspective of Indigenous people in cities. First of all, such representations reinforce dominant stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as somehow incarcerated by place (Appadurai, 1988). In the social imaginary of majority populations, this naturalizes the idea of Indigenous people being ‘out-of-place’ in urban areas. Secondly, the sedentary image of Indigeneity effaces the role of mobility, migration, and interethnic interaction in Indigenous histories. As Cobb argues (2005), this essentializes a false distinction between the hypermobility of modern life and the timeless, local insularity of Indigenous societies. Thirdly, static representations of

<sup>(4)</sup> In taking up this discussion, I do not presume that all Indigenous peoples experience cities equally; nor do I look to ignore or depoliticize the reasons for migration. I appreciate that many migrants may actually move to the city to assimilate into majority society. My concern here is to demythologize the ‘either/or’ idea associated with Indigenous identity and to discuss ways in which Indigenous peoples can and do maintain and transform connections to their cultural and social heritage in urban locations.

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Indigenous societies normalize modern-day territorial boundaries that are a reflection more often of colonial history than of traditional geographies. They also overlook the evidence from oral histories and archaeological studies that reveals the much greater overlap between modern-day cities and traditional domains (see Pritchard, 2002).

Finally, and most importantly perhaps, the strategic regionalization of Indigenous life to place plays an integral role in shaping and legitimating authentic modes of belonging to ‘the land’. Living ‘off-reserve’ and moving to the city or to another community or even country is thought to denigrate claims to an Indigenous identity and negatively affect Indigenous relationships to place. This leads to the assumption that Indigenous people are ‘out-of-place’ anywhere beyond their territorial borders and that in the city they come to constitute a social problem. Such totalizing ideas, however, trivialize the affective ties to place from those living elsewhere, in diaspora, through memory, temporary visits and family narratives. Smith (2006) in his work on nonlocal Aboriginal attachments to community in central Cape York peninsula, North Australia, contends that these kind of ties—shaped by a place where “locality and mobility are deeply intertwined” as he puts it—are legitimate diasporic expressions of the Indigenous modern and, indeed, “aspects of place itself” (Smith, 2006, page 221). Similarly, Lamphere (2007, pages 1141–1142), from a case study on migration and assimilation amongst a Navajo family, explains how, regardless of physical location, the ritual birthing experiences of the maternal grandmother continue to tie her extended kin network to the land. Gegeo (2001, page 495), from the standpoint of Kwara’ae epistemology in the South Pacific, discusses how a native from that region “can be anywhere and still inextricably tied to place”. While it is obvious that these translocal ties to place are expressions of subjective experience, they also shape concrete, communal patterns of socioeconomic behaviour. Eversole (2005), for example, demonstrates in research on Quechua out-migration from home communities in Bolivia that urban mobility does not represent a fracturing of community ties but, rather, the geographical extension of strategies to access resources that are otherwise limited locally.

The point here is that an increase in urban Indigenous populations does not signify the end of Indigenous communities but, instead, draws greater attention to the expressive emergence of what I term ‘diasporic Indigeneity’—the fluid negotiation and extension of modern Indigenous identities and histories in nonlocal settings. By following Gegeo (2001) and focusing more on what this may mean for the *nature* of Indigeneity rather than its politics, then, in terms of place, Indigenous out-migration is not about the loss of place but about refiguring and redefining the reality of Indigenous places and communities in the contemporary world in and through the lived experiences of its people. As Darnell (2005, pages 164–168) highlights in her work on “nomadic legacies”—referring to the fact that today Aboriginal resources in Canada are more likely to include education, employment, and health services located in urban areas than fish and moose in the bush—we should be talking about extensions as opposed to departures. Further, it is by looking at the processes and strategies through which Indigenous peoples appropriate the urban environment and make places for themselves there that it is possible to generate a more informed understanding of modern, urban Indigenous society.

### **Place and the articulation of indigenous identities in urban environments**

Harvey and Thompson (2005), Todd (2000/01), Wilson and Peters (2005), and Watson (2006) amongst others in recent years have all suggested ways in which the Indigenous experience of migration from a rural homeland to an urban center reflects the broader theorization of international migrant life. After all, many Indigenous migrants

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contemplating their move to major cities face very similar challenges to those crossing national borders: for example, the need to speak a different language, to learn a different culture, or to negotiate a bureaucratic social system replete with differing spiritual values and expectations of the individual. In fact, it is an irony of Indigenous migration that where colonial borders have intersected traditional territorial domains it may be easier for migrants to move within their own cultural sphere and, therefore, move 'abroad' than to migrate within the same country (cf Hedberg and Kepsu, 2008). It is these kinds of factors that led Todd (2000/01) to coin the phrase 'internal transnationalism' when talking about Aboriginal migration to the city of Vancouver, a concept that I believe subtly resonates across the gamut of situations globally.

Today, when we talk of 'urban Indigeneity' we are talking about life that is properly diasporic in many of its forms and practices. As with ethnic migrants, Indigenous migration to the city does not (necessarily) involve the deterritorialization of belonging and identification; nor does it prevent the creation of belonging in the urban environment (Ehrkamp, 2005, page 349). Furthermore, and what I would like to specifically highlight is that, in parallel with their ethnic counterparts, Indigenous peoples also engage with and create *places* in the articulation of their identities which transform the geography of the city (Ehrkamp, 2005, page 349). These places obviously take different forms and operate at differing scales of community. At the high end of collective organization, for example, they may be community centers that offer families and individuals a place to gather. However, in that Indigenous groups in cities usually struggle to receive recognition let alone financial support from national, regional, or metropolitan government agencies, these places can often be highly improvised. Such centers may be only a temporary space either hired, borrowed, or created on a weekly, monthly, or longer basis. So we find that the Iroquois in Rochester, New York, stage their all-important 'socials' in the auditorium of the Rochester Museum and Science Center (Krouse, 2001) whereas Inuit in Montreal congregate for a monthly feast in an Anglican church (Kishigami, 2006). Of course, in some cities (in New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and the United States, for example) more permanent, structured facilities do exist and provide members with access to health, education, employment, and other services.

From this heightened level of collectivity, the intersection of place and identity also occurs at the smaller scale of the individual. Wilson and Peters (2005), on the experiences of Anishinabek migrants in three cities in Ontario, Canada, discuss how their respondents go about negotiating their individual relationship to 'the land' which represents a critical aspect of their cultural identity. One strategy is the creation of "small-scale places of cultural safety" in the city (page 403). These places may be located in gardens, in parks, or within homes and provide individuals with the space to reterritorialize or reformulate their Indigenous identity in the city through culturally meaningful practices such as the offering of tobacco to a tree or lake or carrying out a smudging ceremony. In association with the examples of self-organization above, these kinds of practices are extremely important in thinking about the urban Indigenous experience in terms of emplacement. It is through the creation of different places that Indigenous people are able to appropriate the city in their own way as individuals and/or as a collective group and empower themselves in the process by resisting dominant representations of their cultural identity—of being told where and who they should be. Emplacement in the city is critical to urban Indigenous experiences because it has the power to denote more than just social activity; it actively *enables* people to belong and, though highly mutable, facilitates one's feeling at home (cf Spark, 1999, page 62).

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There is more at stake in being Indigenous and 'at home' in the city than one may assume. Consequently, the ramifications of Indigenous place-making practices are enormous and require careful consideration when writing about urban Indigenous situations. Of primary interest are the actual dynamics and subtleties of how and why places are made and the ways in which they intersect with and affect the identities of people who create, occupy, or pass through them. It is with these questions in mind that I turn to the case of Ainu in Tokyo.

### **Tokyo Ainu: a brief history**

It is a little known fact both within Japan and abroad that Ainu live and work in the Kantō region and have done so, in varying numbers, for over a hundred years. One of the first indications to the international community of their situation in the capital appeared in 1998 when a group called the Ainu International Network presented a statement to the 16th session of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) in Geneva. In that statement, the Ainu delegation described how, from the 1950s on, an increasing number of Ainu started to participate in a dramatic if mostly unrecognized migration to the south. This was due in large part to the persistence of difficult socioeconomic conditions across Hokkaidō, cheaper transportation routes, and the rise of high-demand labor markets in the mainland urban centers. Although statistics on Ainu in the capital were unavailable until 1974, we know from the stories of Ainu migrants and workers that the Ainu population in the Kantō area was growing rapidly at that time (see Ogasawara, 1990).

Patterns of long-term and permanent residency in the capital region started to demarcate a new geographical space of Ainu life. This, in turn, created the demand for new forms of social and political organization. By the early 1970s two Ainu women, Ukaji Shizue and Urakawa Mitoko, organized the first Ainu association and held meetings at which a decision was made to lobby the Tokyo government for funds to conduct a socioeconomic survey of Ainu in the capital. The survey was eventually carried out in 1974. Issues such as lack of education, inadequate housing, discrimination, and low-paid jobs were reported. This survey helped to galvanize the efforts of Ainu in the capital to try and better accommodate Ainu migrants in finding employment, housing, and a social network of support. Whilst a lack of finances and swift turnover of volunteers soon made such plans difficult to carry forward, the association was able to establish an Ainu employment counsellor attached to the Tokyo government: a position which continues today. Despite some notable setbacks during the late 1970s, by the early 1980s three main Ainu associations were in operation (a fourth was added in 1997), each helping their members with cultural classes and with issues relating to everyday life.

The formation of multiple organizations indicates political divisions amongst Ainu but it also reflects the reappearance of a traditional Ainu social structure in the capital drawn along regional lines. This refers to the fact that the makeup of each group was of Ainu from particular regions of Hokkaidō, reflecting how, traditionally, Ainu identities were highly localized to the extent that clothing, language, myths, and so on varied quite considerably between regions (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1976). Whilst this social dynamic generated a range of different projects, Ainu also had collective goals that unified the movement, such as the founding of a *seikatsukan* or independent community center. This ambition represented a step towards equalizing Ainu rights with those in Hokkaidō, where each community had access to a place where it could receive advice and practice culture. As a means of pressuring the metropolitan government to act on this, a second formal survey of the Ainu population in the capital was carried out in 1988 and reported similar findings to the previous survey. Unfortunately, the government took no action based on the survey and the goal of a *seikatsukan* still remains.



By the 1990s the increasing identification of Tokyo as a permanent home by Ainu presented a significant challenge to the regionalization of Ainu affairs to Hokkaidō. It started to call into question the exclusion of non-Hokkaidō Ainu from Ainu welfare policies in Hokkaidō. It also questioned the omission of non-Hokkaidō Ainu from the seven-yearly survey of the Ainu population and their socioeconomic circumstances. In fact, throughout the 1990s a significant politicization of Ainu issues took place in the capital as the movement started to focus more on the impending replacement of the Hokkaidō Former Natives Protection Act with new government legislation. In 1994, the Rera Cise restaurant opened as the result of a national fund-raising campaign and soon became a hub of Ainu political as well as cultural activity. Ainu associated with the Rera Cise were quick to voice the hopes of many Ainu that the change in legislation would finally admonish the regionalization of Ainu policies to Hokkaidō and recognize the national demographics of Ainu society. In 1997, the Lower House finally passed the CPA. Although it had promised much, its preoccupation with Ainu culture—defined as dance, language, craftwork, etc—at the expense of more human-rights-oriented issues failed to provide Ainu in Tokyo with recognition of their issues. Nevertheless, under the principles of the law, Ainu formed a single contact group to enter in negotiations with the government over the establishment of a culture center in the capital and achieved some notable concessions.

Today, the ambition of a *seikatsukan* still remains, whilst a strong emphasis is being placed on establishing formal relations with the Human Rights Office of the Tokyo government. A more definitive urban identity is also emerging with attempts to legitimate non-Hokkaidō claims to their rights as Indigenous people and, thanks to the Japanese government's recent recognition of Ainu as Indigenous, plans are afoot to transform the Hokkaidō Utari Association into a national and therefore fully inclusive organization. The Tokyo movement still retains four main Ainu organizations although a new group founded by Ainu youth, called Ainu Rebels,<sup>(5)</sup> has recently formed and characterizes the extent to which Ainu life in the capital remains vibrant, politically engaged, and forward-looking.

### **Ainu identities and the articulation of place in Tokyo**

The role of place in the articulation (and reproduction of) individual and communal Ainu identities is particularly evident in Tokyo. Indeed, this is not anything 'new' as research into the history of Ainu movement to the capital demonstrates it to be replete with instances of place-based consociation that has enabled Ainu to gather and self-organize through time (Watson, 2006). Still, there are three primary 'places' of Ainu sociality in the capital integral to the processes of individual identification and community building there. The first is the Rera Cise, an Ainu-managed restaurant in western Tokyo that provides a menu of traditional Ainu foodstuffs cooked and presented in a modern way. As an Ainu establishment and unique example of Indigenous entrepreneurship, the restaurant is what one might call an *autonomous* site. It serves a dual function as both an economic venture open to customers and a private space for cultural activities and consociation. The restaurant's significance lies in how it brings memory and culture into one place, creating a 'safespace' (Iewallen, 2006) where Ainu are able not only to socialize, talk, practice culture, but also to associate with others and relax. Secondly, there is the Ainu Cultural Exchange Center opened in 1998 and funded by the government as part of its commitment to the CPA. Under the provisions of the act, this is a *public* place. It is there to serve all people, Ainu and non-Ainu alike, who wish to know or find out more about Ainu culture. Despite its

<sup>(5)</sup> See the Ainu Rebels webpage at <http://www.ainurebels.com/>

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public function, Ainu use and appropriate the center in their own way and it is by focusing on these dynamics that broader questions are raised about the politics of space and marginality in Tokyo. Thirdly, there is the *sociopolitical* place of the Kantō region itself, which operates at two very different scales of sociality: first, there is the mobility and spontaneity of micro place-creation, of the ways in which cultural events such as ceremonies are performed at regular but also geographically disparate sites throughout the region; secondly, and of more political consequence, is the idea of Kantō as a site of Ainu identification that contravenes the regionalization of Ainu affairs to Hokkaidō. I turn first to the Rera Cise restaurant.

### **The Rera Cise: an autonomous place**

The Rera Cise means ‘House of Wind’ in the Ainu language and is located in a narrow three-story property in Nakano-ward in western Tokyo. It first opened in 1994 as the result of a successful if hard-fought national fund-raising campaign initiated by a small group of Ainu in the late 1980s (Rera no Kai, 1997). After fifteen years, it stands as testament to the perseverance of Ainu and their supporters and to the acuity of Ainu entrepreneurship. As represented by the salmon on the hand-carved sign that hangs outside the Rera Cise’s entrance-way, the range of ingredients that the Ainu chefs draw on to create the cuisine reflects the kinds of meat, fish, and plants traditionally used within Ainu society. Yet, as the front page of the menu informs or, perhaps, reassures its customers, the restaurant’s production of “Traditional Ainu Food” (which would by itself constitute bland fare by modern standards) is “from recipes arranged in a modern way” and provides an array of exquisitely prepared dishes that ably complement Nakano’s ethnic food market.

As a Cise the restaurant adopts an important role in Tokyo Ainu society. Cise means ‘house’ or ‘home’ in the Ainu language and is a domestic metaphor of welcome for Ainu. When recognized as a place that produces foods that many Ainu youths may never have tried before or that middle-aged Ainu may only remember from time spent with their grandmother as a child, the restaurant reworks the idea of a traditional family dwelling into a wholly modern urban ‘home’ in several ways. Socially, the Cise provides a safe and familiar space for Ainu to engage in cultural revitalization and ceremonial practice. The restaurant is designed so that on the second level a section of the floor can be removed to reveal a fully functioning ceremonial hearth. Traditionally, the hearth was the symbolic and physical centre of a Cise and home for *Ape Fuchi Kamuy*, the deity of fire, who represents the all-important mediator between the world of humans and the world of *kamuy* or spirits. This enables Ainu to conduct ceremonies throughout the year and allows Ainu, both young and old, to learn about and engage in the cultural dimensions of their heritage that they may otherwise feel is available to them only in Hokkaidō. Another point to this dynamic is that as a privately owned and run space it offers Ainu the opportunity to congregate, socialize, and practice cultural activities on their own terms without the external limitations of a tenant code (enforced by landlords). The significance of this cannot be emphasized enough in light of numerous urban Indigenous campaigns around the world which aspire to obtain the space to gather and socialize in the city.

The Cise also establishes a symbolic place of family in the capital. It is, after all, a true ‘place’ in the sense of being a meeting-up point of social relations. Indeed, in Tokyo, a defining characteristic for members and supporters of the Cise is its open and social atmosphere that one often hears referred to as resembling a family environment. These processes of Ainu consociation counter the deterritorialization-of-identity model associated with the disappearance of Indigenous peoples in cities. In fact, the Cise actually allows Ainu the chance to foster and experience their ‘Indigenous’ identity, sometimes

for the first time. This is a critical role of the Cise in terms of how it comes to affect the self-awareness and identities of individuals. Let me provide an example from fieldwork.

**“See if you feel you fit in”: the lived experience of Ainu identity**

As a standard business model, the restaurant puts on a monthly ceremony or talk conducted by Ainu for the general public to pay for and attend. Included in the price is a drink and choice of food from the menu. One particular evening, Nomoto Hisae, an elder from Chitose, Hokkaidō, joined Hasegawa Osamu, the leader of the (Tokyo) Ainu Association of Rera, at the Cise. They talked about a ceremony at the restaurant that Nomoto himself had led that afternoon. The room was packed that night and was made up mainly of young Japanese. To the left and slightly in front of me seated alongside the edge of the hearth was the striking figure of Arata,<sup>(6)</sup> a young man in his mid-twenties with a full dark beard, thick head of hair down to his shoulders, and bushy eyebrows. Despite a personal aversion on my part to the identification of Ainu by any particular physical characteristic, even I couldn’t help but notice how ‘Ainu’ he looked, to the extent I thought that his features resembled that of an imagined noble warrior; yet, from where I sat, a hint of dreadlocks in his hair suggested a distinctly contemporary orientation. Once Nomoto had finished the talk, the floor was opened to questions. A customary silence of a few seconds followed, during which time the eyes of the two elders fell on the young man.

Hasegawa spoke first, asking after his family roots. Arata, in a very slow and assured tone, spoke of his childhood in the Tohoku region in northern Japan and of personal interest in his family’s background since growing up, when he found himself looking decidedly “different” from his friends at school. He said he had wanted to ask his grandmother about any possible Ainu connection in the family but his parents silenced him and the question was never spoken of again. Nomoto noted that the man’s facial characteristics were uncanny and could not help but assume some Ainu relation somewhere. He then followed up by asking whether the young man felt any affiliation to Ainu culture, to which he replied that he was unsure but felt a need to find out, explaining his attendance at the talk. This brief interchange was ended by Hasegawa, a protagonist in Tokyo Ainu life, advising him to attend similar kinds of events over the coming weeks or months to see “if he felt he fitted in”.

I was a regular attendee at Ainu events in Tokyo during two years of fieldwork and I only ever saw Arata once more, at an Ainu music concert the following week. It is, of course, impossible to know the reasons why he never returned thereafter, but his absence serves to highlight what the elder actually meant by his advice and, furthermore, underlines a distinct disjuncture between racial and cultural identity that is widely regarded (if not overtly) as a common tension within contemporary Ainu society. The young man’s ignorance as to his own ancestral heritage, in spite of inquiries to close family members, is by and large a common experience shared by many of today’s younger generation. The general association in the public imagination between Ainu and the social stigma of discrimination, economic marginalization, poverty, and so on prevents many parents from informing their children of their family backgrounds (if, that is, they know themselves). Ainu ancestry may well fall into a family secret that becomes lost over the generations. Within this social context, the elder’s advice of ‘seeing if you feel you fit in’ reveals a progressive position on Ainu identity indicative of the Cise itself. It represents a shift away from a closed and fixed idea of a primordial, racial group to an open and fluid concept of a ‘historical ethnic collectivity’. In other words, it is a position that dismisses an either (Ainu)/or (Japanese) basis to identity claims—recognizing the inherent social complexity of

<sup>(6)</sup> This is a pseudonym.

defining ‘Ainu identity’ along essentialist bloodlines—to foreground historical dictates and the fact that there is no, and can be no, homogeneous Ainu group identity but only variation and specificity embedded in the historicity of lived experience. Although this perspective does little to alleviate circumstances of intragroup discrimination, it, nevertheless, moves the focus of attention away from unhelpful issues of authenticity and towards a more pragmatic and realist politics of identity that takes full account of the historical conditions underpinning the social, political, *and* geographical fragmentation of Ainu society as well as the fact that ‘Ainu’ today is one identity amongst many—woman, factory worker, wife/husband, mother/father, etc—that people negotiate in their lives (if they so choose).

In this respect, the Cise offers a way for Ainu and non-Ainu alike to learn more about Ainu life and culture and, in the process, learn more about themselves as Japanese or Ainu or as both. It also offers Ainu both young and old the opportunity to anchor their identity in a socially and culturally meaningful way to a physical location in the city where they are welcome and can receive support if in difficulty. In a myriad of ways, the social encounters, interactions, and relations that make the Cise what it is weave in and out of the identities of Ainu who go there.

### **Ainu Cultural Exchange Center: a public place**

In distinction from the Rera Cise, the Tokyo Ainu Cultural Exchange Center is a public space officially run and managed by the Foundation for the Research and Promotion of Ainu Culture (*Zaidan hōjin Ainu bunka shinkō/kenkyū suishin kikō*) set up to oversee the implementation of the CPA. As a ‘culture center’, its role is essentially threefold: first, to help support Ainu activities of cultural transmission in the capital region; second, to promote exchange between Ainu and non-Ainu about Ainu traditions; and, third, to provide information and material for Ainu and the general public regarding Ainu culture. The center occupies a small yet generous space in the heart of Tokyo, just a two-minute walk from Tokyo station.

For Ainu in Tokyo the plans for a center raised hopes for the establishment of a *seikatsukan* in the capital. However, it was soon clear that the emphasis of the law on cultivating a diverse and respectful national society would not allow that to happen. At one level, the center has come to epitomize distinct tensions that Ainu have with the CPA in general. The most prominent of these is the law’s reductive definition of ‘Ainu culture’ to traditional arts—language, woodcarving, sewing, music, and so on—which ignores the position of Ainu activists who want the government to regard Ainu culture in more expansive terms as everyday life and, therefore, inclusive of issues such as human and Indigenous rights, welfare compensation, and employment equity. This tension has, at times, found expression in the use of the space. One example was an off-the-cuff remark made by the center’s director—a Japanese government bureaucrat—several years ago regarding the locking of the center’s toilet doors to prevent homeless people coming in to use them. The director’s comment upset one Ainu elder, in particular, who had worked for a number of years with and on behalf of Ainu homeless in Tokyo. The assumption the elder had made from this was that not all Ainu were welcome to use the facilities. This is a deep-seated concern for Ainu that stretches into consternation with the law as a whole. As expressed by the Kantō-based Ainu International Network in their 1998 statement to the WGIP, anxieties exist over the possible social division of Ainu by the law into “those who can practice our ‘traditional culture’ (sing our songs, make our crafts, or speak our language) and those who cannot.” Examples of this kind of insensitivity to the broader set of issues of Ainu life, of which ‘culture’ as defined by the law is only a small part, continue to raise questions and with them frustrations for Ainu over the center’s actual role as a space of Ainu culture.

However, Ainu are active agents in their use of the center and they seek to appropriate it for their own purposes. In terms of physical space, all four main Ainu organizations in the capital have a large metal cabinet assigned to them in which they keep materials for classes or meetings. Whilst this highlights the level of social activity in the region, it also forms a constant reminder of the relations that divide as well as unify Ainu collectivity in the capital. Next to these cabinets is a door that opens onto a washroom and shower facility. In fact, this door is discretely sectioned off from the rest of the office space so that even a repeat visitor will not know that a shower room is there. This feature is reflective of the *seikatsukan* model and indicative of the wider campaign of Kantō-resident Ainu, aimed at integrating Ainu issues into the social policy of the metropolitan government. The shower symbolizes the experience of discrimination many Ainu face in public bathhouses from majority society as a result of their hirsute features. As many Ainu live at the lower end of the economic scale and may not be able to afford an apartment with an adjoining bathroom, the use of public facilities is often a necessity. The Ainu campaign prior to the center's opening to incorporate a shower in its design attempts to extend the concept of 'culture' beyond the narrow definition endorsed by the law to include the wider structural issues of discrimination and social marginalization that Ainu may face in their everyday lives.

Ainu usage of the center to hold group meetings, meet other Ainu, take part in language or craftwork classes, and so on represents the many different ways Ainu negotiate multiple attachments of belonging in the city. At one level, participation in classes is usually delineated along organizational lines and characterizes how Ainu negotiate their identity locally in terms of the factional divisions that define Ainu society in the capital. These divisions are not hard and fast, however. By uniting around campaigns for the collective rights of Ainu in the capital—like that undertaken to incorporate the shower—the groups help to foster the idea of 'Tokyo Ainu' as a politically viable identity. At the same time, engaging in cultural practices allows Ainu to create or reaffirm attachments to their ancestral heritage and family history in Hokkaidō. For those who are creating these attachments anew, this could be the beginning of a difficult journey (as noted above in discussion of the young man at the Cise), but it is one that many Ainu will encourage others to take. This dynamic demonstrates that, to whatever extent Ainu activity in the capital formalizes a local Tokyo Ainu identity, it will always be inextricably linked to family and historical relations with Hokkaidō. This complicates both the bounded static idea of Ainu life tied to the ancestral land of Hokkaidō and the notion of an urban Ainu movement evolving independently of 'home'. Social activity at the center shows that the two are inherently entwined.

### **The Kantō region: a sociopolitical place**

Finally, there is the broader idea of the Kantō region as a new place of Ainu identity. Although one might assume that the dynamics at work above naturally reinforce the legitimacy of Ainu belonging in the capital, the political reality of this proposition suggests otherwise. On this matter, ambivalence defines the sentiments of many Ainu, especially first-generation migrants and those of an older generation, for whom Hokkaidō is and can be the only dominant point of reference for modern Ainu life. A palpable tension surrounding the politics of Ainu belonging and self-identification outside the traditional homeland stretches back to the early 1970s. The issue stems from the conventional use of 'Kantō-resident Ainu' (*Kantō zaijyu Ainu*) as a group ethnonym vis-à-vis '*Kantō Ainu*'. Whereas the use of 'resident' in the category 'Kantō-resident Ainu' assumes that Ainu come from elsewhere and only reside (to varying degrees of permanence) in the capital region, the category 'Kantō Ainu' asserts a more

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definite, ontological tone in Ainu being *of* Kantō and therefore *of* a region in much the same way Ainu are identified regionally throughout Hokkaidō (Ohnuki-Tierney, 1976).

To stretch the geographical boundaries of Ainu Mosir south beyond the Tsugaru Strait to include the Kantō region is a deeply political project that has much more at stake than the act of reworking lines on an imagined map would perhaps imply. On the one hand, this may not seem so difficult to do. As DeChicchis (1995, pages 104–105) points out, the territorial referent of Ainu Mosir for Ainu has never been particularly clear. On the other hand, however, Siddle demonstrates how by the 1970s the term had become integrated into the “vocabulary of Ainu struggle” as both the vague physical expression of a “national territory” tied to the ultra left-wing rally cry for an “Ainu Republic” and a utopist reference to “a golden age in which Ainu lived independent and happy communal lives in harmony with nature until these were destroyed by subsequent invasion and colonization” (Siddle, 1996, page 176). Therefore, the emergence of Ainu Mosir in recent decades as one of the most emotive and widely recognized symbols of Indigenous Ainu nationalism has normalized its claim to social and political capital *in* Hokkaidō. Its articulation has helped to mobilize the Ainu cause in the public domain and strengthened political and cultural assertions of an Indigenous identity in the international arena and associated campaigns for effective participation in Japanese society (Kawashima, 2004). At a more grounded level, it has also become a prominent metaphor of ancestry, heritage, and belonging for Ainu that continues to blend a sense of a romanticized past with the exigencies of current-day political realities.

In distinction from the consolidation of an Ainu identity in the north, the social construction of an urban identity in the capital region has been a slow and hesitant process (see Watson, 2006). Yet, whilst the political struggles implicit to this process may have periodically obscured its objectives, they have never detracted from its relevance. This becomes evident when one considers the role of such an identity in two particular ways: first, in framing Ainu attempts to make real their Indigenous emplacement in the region; and, second, its mobilization of political capital in the campaign for Ainu specific rights in the city. Let me take the matter of emplacement first. Through ceremonial practice in locations across Kantō, Ainu have begun to reimagine their relations with the landscape in traditional ways, which has led them to formulate a new social geography of the region. Ceremonies are one of the principal ways Ainu communicate directly with *kamuy* or deities and it is one of the main cultural forms that reaffirms their existence in the world. Ainu rely on *kamuy* who exist in all things for the provision of food, shelter, good health, and so on—to coexist with *kamuy* is to ensure that the Ainu relationship with them is well balanced. Ceremonies offer the opportunity for Ainu to give gifts to *kamuy* and pray for continued well-being or to ask for their assistance. In order for a ceremony to be performed successfully, it is necessary for the principal elder (traditionally a man) to address *Ape-Fuchi-Kamuy* (the deity of fire) and inform her of his intentions. By doing this, the elder wishes to gain her cooperation as an intermediary between the human world (Ainu Mosir) and the world of deities (*Kamuy Mosir*). The first line spoken in Ainu by an Ainu elder at a ceremony therefore involves a kind of personal introduction to *Ape-Fuchi-Kamuy*, noting, most importantly, where he is from. As each region is populated by different *kamuy* and, by association, different Ainu, pronouncement of one's relationship to a specific *kotan* or region is extremely important as it immediately indicates to *Ape-Fuchi-Kamuy* which deities one may wish to communicate with.

To my knowledge, it was standard practice that Ainu in Tokyo would begin ceremonies by identifying themselves in terms of their familial or ancestral ‘home’ *kotan* in Hokkaidō.

During the period of my fieldwork, however, a significant shift took place whereby a noted Ainu elder in the capital voiced his intent to conduct a *kamuy-nomi* (prayer for the deities) by identifying himself as an ‘Ainu from Tokyo kotan’ and to call upon kamuy in the Tokyo region for support. The identification of the Kantō region as a place of kamuy was a critically important statement. Not only did it appropriate the landscape and geography of the region as part of the Ainu world, but it also naturalized Ainu attachments to their culture *locally*, emplacing and thereby legitimizing the articulation of an Ainu identity in the region through the evocation of kamuy. This move has since been reinforced by an annual *icharpa* (ceremony of ancestral worship) held on the central Tokyo site of a colonial school for Ainu built in 1872 at which several Ainu died. The ceremonial need to identify prominent kamuy in the surrounding landscape has been dutifully negotiated by the Ainu participants and adds to the increasing intensification of Ainu relations to the physical geography of the capital region.

The other way in which the Kantō region acts as a place through which Ainu are able to identify themselves is as a site of collective political action. Identification as Kantō Ainu establishes a platform for Ainu leaders in the capital to campaign for the equalization of rights vis-à-vis Ainu in Hokkaidō. In the same vein as Ainu culture and society, Ainu policy in Japan is regionalized to the borders of Hokkaidō. As mentioned above, this means that Ainu who live outside of Hokkaidō cannot receive benefits from a special welfare act that provides Hokkaidō Ainu with a number of benefits, including access to low-interest-rate loans. Non-Hokkaidō Ainu are also exempt from inclusion in the seven-yearly survey of the Ainu population and their socioeconomic circumstances. This means that the national conditions and demographics of Ainu are not well-known and it only reaffirms the idea in the minds of policy makers and the general public alike that Ainu remain solely in Hokkaidō. With official recognition of Ainu as Indigenous, however, it is hoped that a better understanding of the socioeconomic and cultural situation of Ainu will soon pave the way for the accommodation of Tokyo Ainu within national policies.

### **Conclusion: urbanizing Indigenous studies**

In ways that mirror the cultural and symbolic emplacement of Ainu in the Kantō region through ceremonial practice, the idea of Kantō Ainu as a political identity reimagines the space of the capital as a legitimate site of Ainu life. This provides Ainu with an attachment to a permanent local identity that stands alongside the traditional regional identities in Hokkaidō. Of course, acceptance of this ‘new’ regional identity is not a straightforward matter as much is at stake, especially in terms of rights to land and traditional resources in Hokkaidō. Nevertheless, the emerging urban reality of Ainu society should not be ignored and the very real ways in which Ainu are negotiating their identities in nontraditional areas need to be taken seriously. Consideration of place is one way in which this can be achieved.

A place-based focus provides a means of engaging with and highlighting a range of processes. From attachments to a familial and supportive environment at the Rera Cise, to the more formal negotiation of modern urban life with traditional culture at the Cultural Exchange Center, places in Tokyo underscore how Ainu foster and reproduce a social identity and movement in the city. Furthermore, the history of Ainu political organization in the capital and of urban activity as Ainu contests the standard framing of Ainu life. This can be seen in recognizing kamuy in the environment or the creation of a political agenda for Ainu rights based on issues particular to the city. Above all, identification as Ainu in Tokyo moves the standard definition away from the exigencies of a place-bound ontology tied inexorably to the land towards a more open, progressive, and historical understanding of Indigeneity as

complex, mobile, and fluid. This shift is particularly pronounced in the capital, where the majority of Ainu may either be too busy with their everyday lives as business people, factory workers, students, mothers, father, husbands, wives, etc to get involved in organized social or political activities or consciously choose not to participate at all and assimilate into majority society. Similarly, new attachments to an Ainu identity may emerge or old ones may become modified.

A major point which this case study highlights is that, in spite of interest in the broader literature on local citizenship models and the possibility of reimagining cities as new sites for citizen rights, a sustained focus on *urban* Indigenous citizenship has yet to develop in any significant or comparative way. All too easily, urban Indigenous residents are represented as not really Indigenous or somehow Other to friends and relatives 'at home'. This perspective can have serious ramifications in terms of gaining access to community affiliation and rights in the city. It is also often the cause of deep-seated political and personal friction between urban and rural communities based on ideas of what it means to be a member of the group. I suggest that by shifting interest away from essentialist renderings of difference towards a more fluid, experiential understanding we gain insight in to how Indigenous peoples emplace themselves in cities and negotiate individual and collective attachments to their identity and to their culture. If urban Indigenous studies is to become a serious subfield of academic inquiry, which I contend it must, then place deserves consideration as a key research area.

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