

# What if Aboriginal people helped all Australians to connect to country?

Picture this: every time Malcolm Turnbull addresses the nation, he acknowledges the Aboriginal country he was born on. @IndigenousX host Charlie Jia imagines a new kind of united Australian identity



Charlie Jia: ‘How much better would it be if when an Australian is born on Aboriginal country, his or her connection to the land is a given.’ Photograph: Supplied

Charlie Jia for IndigenousX

Charlie Jia is an entrepreneur with an interest in businesses with a social conscience. He hails from North Queensland.

Monday 2 November 2015 11.00 AEDT Last modified on Thursday 19 November 2015 13.28 AEDT

What is the true Australian identity?

This is Aboriginal land. Our people were always here.

This is the situation. This will never change.

Despite this truth, most Australians believe that Aboriginal people are Australians, first. Whereas most Aboriginal people would say, “we are Aboriginal first”.

Our Aboriginal sporting heroes, our Aboriginal politicians, our Aboriginal actors would all say they are representing their people. Most of us would say exactly the same thing.

So, isn’t it about time the Commonwealth of Australia stopped trying to make Aboriginal people Australian? Instead, why don’t we make Australians Aboriginal?

When I was asked to write about something that I wanted to share, I had my reservations. This is fairly hard for me to do and I take full responsibility and ownership of these thoughts. Whether my thoughts are right or wrong, they are not intended to insult, disrespect or offend anyone. I offer them merely to start a conversation about a different perspective, about an idea.

I guess you could say the idea first came to me back in my uni days. We were lucky enough back then to hear from the late Aboriginal activist, actor, author and elder, Burnum Burnum

who was our guest lecturer. Burnum was born a Woiworrung and Yorta Yorta man at Wallaga Lake in southern New South Wales.

Burnum corrected a young non-Aboriginal student when she said she was born in Grafton, NSW. He politely informed this young student that she was from the Bundjalung nation and that she should get to know her country, her people, their history and their culture.

I was blown away. There is something in what he said that warranted more thought.

I know Aboriginal people out there who would not entertain the idea of welcoming non-Aboriginal people into their community. I know there are people out there that would not be interested in knowing more about the spiritual connection Aboriginal people have to the land. But if we continue to harbour segregation, divisiveness and the racial attitudes that this creates, our identity as a nation will continue to be severely compromised.

For many years, cultural awareness, reconciliation yarning circles and now Aboriginal studies in the national curriculum have helped many Australians to understand historical truths, Aboriginal beliefs and customs, language, art and food. I believe that this work is a monumental step forward across the nation.

However, I also believe these initiatives focus on the diversity across cultures, reinstating the differences between black and white and in some ways have kept us apart, in our pigeon holes.

A good example of a country where the traditional culture is embraced by most people is New Zealand. This is evident when Maori and non-Maori (Pakeha) people unite to perform the Haka, a traditional ancestral war cry, dance, or challenge.

Now, I am not expecting non-Aboriginal people should know how to perform at a corroboree. But imagine this: each time [Malcolm Turnbull](#) steps up to the podium, he starts his address by acknowledging the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. Where he was born. Where his connection to country belongs.

I am not saying that non-Aboriginal Australians should have the same rights that Aboriginal people have fought for and continue to fight for.

Though like Burnum Burnum was suggesting, how much better would it be if, when an Australian is born on Aboriginal country, his or her connection to the land is a given.

What I want people to think about is, how much stronger we as Aboriginal people would be if there were more Aboriginal Australians?

If we, as Aboriginal people, see it in our hearts to recognise the connection every person has to the land, the customs, the culture, the history about the people of their birthplace then what greater sense of belonging and identity would this create?

Already as a nation, we have and have had:

- Australians who embrace and who are proud of being part of the oldest living culture in the world.

- Australians who walked side by side for reconciliation.
- Australians who fought side by side on foreign soils.
- Australians who compete internationally as teammates, mentors and coaches.
- Australians who are family, friends, mates and work colleagues.

What would happen if we as Aboriginal people invited and welcomed non-Aboriginal Australians into our community?

- *“Our stories, our way” – each week, a new guest hosts the [@IndigenousX Twitter account](#) to discuss topics of interest to them as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Produced with assistance of Guardian Australia staff.*