

Harley, Kirsten and Wickham, Gary (2014). *Australian Sociology: Fragility, Survival, Rivalry*, Palgrave Macmillan: London.

This short book is one of about two-dozen volumes in the Palgrave Macmillan series on national sociology histories around the world. Australia and New Zealand represent overlaps in colonial histories, the growth of western modernity and forms of intellectual and scientific regimes, yet with very different disciplinary accounts (Crothers 2018). Harley and Wickham's book expands on other historical work, particularly Germov and McGee's 2005 volume, providing additional information, especially about the more recent half-century. They use the phrase from their title as a thematic device to suggest three overlapping themes: 'fragility, survival and rivalry'.

The book comprises six chapters and includes a series of tables and figures supporting their thematic framing of Australian sociology over the 100 years of its history.

Chapter 1, the introductory chapter, sets out their three themes and repeats the common argument that Australian sociology emerged later than the discipline did in Britain and the US. It is worth noting here that Collyer (2017: 87) disputes this argument as 'curious', but may relate to the lack of detailed analysis of earlier work that could be classified as sociological even if not formally so, a view supported by Connell (2010). The authors' primary focus is on the institutionalised academic discipline since the first sociology professorship was established in 1959 at UNSW.

Chapter 2 is the most data-driven chapter of the book. It reviews the last half-century of academic sociology in Australia, describing funding, staffing and growth of student numbers. It provides valuable information for those who are not familiar with the history of the Australian education sector and its expansion since the 1960s. The discipline benefited from new cohorts of students less focused on middle-class careers, including a large proportion of women and working-class students. Sociology found its home primarily at newer 'Redbrick' and 'Gumtree' universities rather than at the premier state institutions 'Sandstones' (with the exception of the University of Tasmania). Harley and Wickham link this variability to their theme of 'fragility'.

Chapter 3 draws upon a variety of informational sources to comment, among many other things, on the wide diversity of sociology course offerings, the content of research and

the interests of sociologists at various institutions. The chapter primarily focuses on the theme of 'rivalry', for instance, speculating that the sheer variety of course offerings has been fed by departmental rivalries. There are alternative explanations that might be advanced, including the genuine diversity of interests of sociologists, or local insularity, rather than a competitive spirit in the expanded discipline.

Chapter 4 considers the role of sociological theory as a central discourse and interpretive activity of the discipline in relation to the broad academic and national discourses during the period of academic sociology in Australia. Today, even within a decade of their writing, three absences are noticeable: first, a lack of reference to Indigenous theorising or scholarship (Moreton-Robinson, 1999); second, lack of mention of environment and climate in Australia, the driest continent; third, limited discussion of local sociological frameworks and perspectives such as Beilharz and Hogan (2012) or Connell (2007).

Chapter 5 focuses on a case study of one institution, the University of Sydney. This study localises their national account, applying the view that 'Australian sociology always gets up when it gets knocked down' (p. 85). However, this account seems more incidental survival than explanatory of the logics and contested position of disciplinary development with the tertiary sector.

Chapter 6 summarises the authors' perspectives with respect to their three themes, and the comparison to the US and Britain. Harley and Wickham's book fits within a genre that contributes to analysis and commentary on the health of sociology in Australia. Earlier, for example, in 2005 Germov and McGee based their argument on three data points: students enrollments nationally, membership data from The Australian Sociological Association (TASA), and citation patterns for Australian sociologists. Their inference from this evidence is that it might be concluded 'sociology [in Australia] can be viewed as healthy' (p. 355). Harley and Wickham's fragility, rivalry and survival argument reads their data in a more pessimistic light in its focus on the vagaries of how sociology has been institutionalised at Australian universities.

Subsequent to Harley and Wickham's book, Collyer's 2017 commentary on the discipline returns to a more positive outlook, notwithstanding 'it is difficult to identify trends in the size and growth of this teaching and research discipline' (p. 86). We agree that the fashion for creating interdisciplinary schools of social sciences at most universities and the lack of clear within-institution branding for sociology make it difficult to assess or

prognosticate about the future health of the discipline. It is a positive note that Harley and Wickham say 'we are not just practitioners of Australian sociology, but admirers of it' (p. 105). They describe sociologists' dilemma, of having a special sense of disciplinary insight into social existence, society and interaction in a tumultuous period of tertiary sector and global change.

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