Contemporary Anthropologies of Indigenous Australia

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Abstract

This review covers sociocultural ethnographies of indigenous Australia from the 1970s to the present. It explores three trends: ethnographic reckonings with indigenous encapsulation within a liberal-settler state; the influence of international theoretical emphases; and movements toward an anthropology of the otherwise. The advent of land repossession, and the ethnographic and employment opportunities this created, indelibly shaped the discipline. With their immersion in land rights and native title, anthropologists were also embroiled in the state adjudication of indigeneity. Beyond the courts, the discipline struggled to shake the strictures of area studies and its ongoing, if unrecognized, imbrication in statist cultural logics. Consequently, indigenist anthropologies have not shifted, but perhaps helped affirm, the West's sense of being the apex of modernity. Emergent approaches, which refuse the ossifications of statist logics using forms of immersion and multimedia ethnography, show signs of ways forward.

INTRODUCTION

In June 2007, following a highly publicized inquiry into suspected sexual abuse of children in Northern Territory indigenous communities (Wild & Anderson 2007), the former coalition government announced the Northern Territory Emergency Response. Like a military operation, this policy quickly acquired a nickname: The Intervention. It unleashed a series of heretofore unimaginable acts, including deployment of the Australian army to oversee the mandated intervention programs in prescribed indigenous communities. Torrid debate about the role and impact of anthropology on public policies followed (see Altman & Hinkson 2007, 2010; Austin-Broos 2011; Lattas & Morris 2010). In Sutton's (2009) controversial *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the End of Liberal Consensus*, anthropologists were accused of downplaying child neglect, pedophilia, alcoholism, self-harm, and violent physical abuse in their delusional upholding of the self-determination of indigenous peoples. The resulting arguments also showed a discipline unsure of its intellectual future, wrestling with fears of irrelevancy in the face of changed subjects and tainted authority (Langton 2011).

This review canvasses the grounds upon which such fears are played. Emphasizing sociocultural ethnographies completed by self-identified anthropologists, I focus here on the era of cultural recognition from the 1970s, when (limited) indigenous entitlements to land and resources first became inscribed in law, to now, when indigenous people and anthropology are both deemed in crisis. Three overlapping patterns are identified. The most dominating is an enduring preoccupation with questions of government: specifically, indigenous encapsulation within a liberal-settler state, and with issues arising from (f)acts of governance. This preoccupation produced a now de rigueur emphasis on interculturality and distinction, resistance and accommodation, continuity and change (Cowlishaw 1988, Hinkson & Smith 2005, MacDonald 2001, Merlan 1998, 2005, Povinelli 1993a, Rowse 1998, Trigger

1992). With the advent of land rights and native title, anthropologists were also embroiled in the state adjudication of authentic indigeneity.

The second pattern concerns the incorporation (and neglect) of certain international theoretical trends, such as the feminist push to recognize the role and place of indigenous women (Bell 1983), or forms of literary self-consciousness (Jackson 1995). The third, smaller, stream identifies work that attempts to decolonize statist thinking, including through ethnographies of media worlds (Ginsburg 2010) and anthropologies "of the otherwise" (Povinelli 2011, ch. 1). This last vein of work also represents the hope for a discipline shackled by the hegemonic epistemologies of area studies. For, viewed on the whole, past and present anthropologies of indigenous Australia have failed to penetrate fundamental Western beliefs, despite the globally unique circumstance of an entire continent inhabited by hunter-gatherers with unbroken provenance. Its collective efforts were never weighty enough to challenge the wider anthropological canon, let alone European ethnocentrism, in any paradigm-shifting way. Nor has the current anguish over anthropology's role in justifying The Intervention generated an extensive historiography of indigenist ethnography, its methods, and its disciplinary practices (Lattas & Morris 2010).

The insularity of Australian indigenist anthropology deserves its own analysis, and this review conforms with parochial genre conventions even when it critiques the inheritance. Yet there is great potential for reconfiguration. I conclude by discussing how anthropology's best contributions still lie in immersed fieldwork, where issues of application, moral judgment, or authoritative policy advice are subordinated to the humbling task of rendering lives as they are and how they get to be so lived, fighting assumed epistemological and material superiorities in the process. However intransigent this recourse to deep ethnography may appear at first blush, such neo-classical collaborations are possibly the only free radical in the contemporary anthropologies of indigenous Australia.

THE BATON PASS FROM OLD TO NEW

Although not active in the contemporary era, William Edward Hanley Stanner established the ground rules for anthropologists working in contemporary indigenous Australia. Stanner began his anthropological career as a structural functionalist trained under Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, founder of Australia's inaugural anthropology department at the University of Sydney. But faced with the radical poverty of Aborigines enslaved to dirt-poor peanut farmers in remote north Australia, Stanner abandoned his mentor's instructions to isolate precontact structures as if these were undisturbed by Western intrusion. Instead, he paid heed to daily lives. His multiply reissued *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938–1973* (Stanner 1979) challenged anthropologists to write holistically. He wanted them not to ignore conditions of colonial intrusion but to show the resilience of aboriginal lifeworlds, while assuming a moral responsibility to help governments decide what to do. Anthropology was to move beyond the cartographic accounts of "who, where, how" in classic studies of clan, land, and ritual. It was to focus on intercultural political struggles and attempt to help Australia see the worth of indigenous culture as part of its national heritage and progeny.

Stanner's model of engaged cultural ethnography found different expression in the work of Tonkinson (1974), Myers (1988, 1991 [1986]), Altman (1987), and more recently, Austin-Broos (2009). Although each has focused on a specific region and its people, aspects of encapsulation are also configured. Myers, in particular, was inspired by Stanner's portrait of the warrior Durmugam (Stanner 1960). Here was "a rich portrait of a person situated in the ethnographer's own time and not simply an abstract bearer of culture," he later wrote (Myers 2006, p. 238). Myers's own *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* focused on the last of the Western Desert nomadic hunter-gatherers, newly forced into sedentary life. Not quite "first contact" (but as close as a modern ethnographer might

ON THE PARA-ETHNOGRAPHIC

Seeking new inspiration for experimental ethnography, Holmes & Marcus (2008) suggest working with contemporary "experts." These professional interlocutors have a "pre-existing ethnographic consciousness or curiosity, which we term para-ethnography" (p. 82) and daily produce texts of such critical sophistication that anthropological critiques are rendered superfluous (p. 84). Working collaboratively with rather than on is thus necessitated. A question arises: Should the para-ethnography of professional text-literate expert classes be so valorized when, as with Australia's expert interveners, it can be so problematic? And what of traditional (e.g., indigenous) interlocutors? Beyond land rights tribunals, expert ethnologisms influence the material distributions of indigenous worlds: when plumbers decide the substandard pipes for effluent disposal and when technology failures are deemed a condition of indigenous primitivism (Lea & Pholeros 2010); or when plans to coerce forms of income management are decided upon (Altman 2011). In professional well-being discourses, Myers's accounts of, say, the reluctance of Pintupi councilors to dock their fellow countrymen's wages in cases of laziness, instead delegating such dirty work to white helpers (Myers 1991 [1986], pp. 268–70), becomes a culturally appropriate rationale for resuming management and control of indigenous resources. Perhaps an indigenous para-ethnography of expert discourses is needed to recuperate the otherwise normative effects of expert para-ethnography.

get), Myers's pioneering ethnography, written from the point of view of the isolated communities of Papunya and Yayayi in the arid heart of Australia, was both an end and a beginning. It broke with the musty ethnologies of aboriginal structures and religious customs with a verve that set scientistic writing back on its heels, trading group-centered emphases for a focus on the tactics of individual personhood within (now institutionally enforced) communalism.

In what is now a standard syllabus piece on Australian ethnography, Myers's compatriot Eric Michaels berated him for issuing another totalizing ethnography, the cultural distinctions of which were drawn from (invented and literary) constructs, the export trade of anthropology (Michaels 1987, Myers 1987). But

in terms of impact, Myers's evocation began anthropologists' (still unresolved) reckoning with that mutable yet increasingly socially reified binary—indigenous/nonindigenous—only Myers showed how social and personal reproduction is transacted not via closed and static exotic structures but dynamically, in active and often highly politicized everyday practice and exchange. Myers jettisoned the evolutionary perspective that underpinned the classicists who preceded him, but he could not wish away the institutional apparatus on which Pintupi livelihoods already depended (see also Myers 2006). Change had to be reckoned with. Those in Myers's wake faced the additional challenge of the advent of land rights, and with it, the ineluctable binding of anthropology to indigenous organizational and representational politics—and to the state.

In this task, they were helped by the conceptual tools of Nicolas Peterson, who introduced ecological perspectives to analyses of changing indigenous worlds (Musharbash & Barber 2011). Peterson (1993) was the first to isolate the concept of "demand sharing" to describe the flexible allocation of kin resources. He showed the dense socialization toward sharing within indigenous communities, the relationship between scarcity and norms of reciprocity among hunter-gatherer groups worldwide, and, conversely, people's manifold tactics for avoiding these otherwise obligatory claims. But like Stanner's shorthand "the Dreaming," Peterson's "demand sharing" traveled widely into bureaucratic grammars where it lost its ethnographic nuance to become a depoliticized truism: Indigenous poverty is not historically but culturally structured, the amassing of individual wealth undercut by indigenous inabilities to refuse the claims of their "humbugging" kin (see also Altman 2011).

Such refractions of anthropological knowledge might be explained away as just so much collateral damage wrought by bureaucratic co-option, but anthropology remains enmeshed in the imaginary and practical enactments of state administration, whether or not ethnographers deliberately embrace explicit policy interests.

Aside from their undertheorized faith in the myth of state (Hansen & Stepputat 2001) and the conceptual restrictions imposed by regional area studies, Australia's strong tradition of public administration of indigenous affairs (Sullivan 2011) and of ensuring land appropriations in the interests of mining and pastoralism (Dombrowski 2010, Wolfe 2006) have indelibly shaped indigenist outputs. The driving concern with continuity and change—the hallmark of contemporary approaches over "salvage" ethnologies—further inflected studies of religion (Charlesworth et al. 2005, Schwarz & Dussart 2010), art (Morphy 1991, Myers 2002), kinship and family structure (Babidge 2010), and accounts of indigenous life in Australia's regional towns (MacDonald 2001) and in metropolitan suburbs (Gale 1972). Only the occasional writer has taken issue with the statist imperative to foreground an indigenous/nonindigenous binary and has refused to write in these terms (Musharbash 2009, Sansom 1980). I return to this point.

REPOSSESSION POSSESSES ANTHROPOLOGY

A key policy prompt for the focus on interactions between indigenous people and conditions of settlement was land rights, itself a mixed bag of recognizing indigenous title and clarifying the rights of capital to encroach on the remnants of the indigenous estate. But neither all indigenous people nor all ethnographies made equally good models. Land repossession ordained a distinctive academic topography, privileging works based in the arid center and across the salt- and freshwater communities of the north where repossession was legally possible. The more densely settled regions of southern and eastern Australia, where the largest populations of indigenous people actually reside, were neglected. Classical ethnographies were revived as key resources in land claims, heritage studies, negotiations with mining companies, and development contests (Peterson & Langton 1983, Sutton 2003, Weiner & Glaskin 2007, Wilmsen 1989). The rejuvenation of anthropological

authority also exposed the discipline to new forms of public scrutiny and dismissal (Windschuttle 2002), infamously played out in the Hindmarsh Island bridge dispute, which tested anthropology's truth claims against politico-legal verities (Bell 1998, Weiner 2001). Once anthropology "agreed" to play an explicit role in state adjudication of indigeneity, it could easily be critiqued as nothing but political. Meanwhile, preparing expert reports for and against claims became a crucial employment option for nonacademic anthropologists, with attendant agonizing into the present day concerning the value of applied work and the intellectual compromise of advocacy versus critical research (Trigger 2011).

In the face of demands for legal certainty linking entitlement to customs, some anthropologists targeted notions of continuity and change for conceptual overhaul. Importantly, Keen (1988) and Beckett (1988) collated ethnographies from across Australia to showcase indigenous life in metropolitan areas, just as considerations of racialized power, structural inequality, and cultural resistance came to the fore (Cowlishaw & Morris 1997). Some began to think through the exponential fractal that is aboriginal descent under Australian systems of recognition (Peterson & Taylor 2002), whereas Cowlishaw (1988) decried the hidden racial typologies underpinning notions of cultural alterity. Drawing from these critiques and from her experiences as a land rights consultant in the Northern Territory, Merlan (1998) tried to transcend the dichotomies of tradition and modern, authentic and inauthentic, which haunt ethnographic and repossession efforts. Comparing a road engineer's recollection of plugging a sinkhole to that of an indigenous woman who saw the rainbow serpent escaping the same pit, Merlan pointed to how both events were partly in sync, thus revealing the permanent inextricability of indigenous and settler sensibilities and interactions. Merlan influentially coined this relation "intercultural" (also Hinkson & Smith 2005, Merlan 2005), advancing on the earlier idea of separate domains (Tonkinson 1974; Trigger 1992, ch. 6).

Nowadays, it is rare to find an author who misses the obligatory nod to interculturality, even if in most instances the institutions of white Australia are not themselves approached ethnographically but remain obscured in such catchall terms as "the state" or "neo-liberal policy." Too often, only one side of the colonial relation is intercultural, despite decades of postcolonial critique. In the same period, critiques of land rights and native title work revealed how indigenous people must now perform an anthropologically created identity form that, as a fragmented and shifting fantasy construct, can never be perfectly embodied (Myers 2002, p. 234, Povinelli 2002, pp. 38, 65). Always found wanting as citizens, they could now be found wanting as indigenes.

Despite the critiques, the grounding of contemporary anthropology in land issues saw state-driven epistemologies backwash yet further into scholarship. Even anthropological descriptions of land as a sentient life force tended to subordinate indigenous concepts to an epistemology of land as commodifiable property (but see Benterrak et al. 1984, Povinelli 1993b, Rose 2000). Altman's work grapples with these exact contradictions (Altman 2010). His concept of a third or "hybrid" indigenous economy did not halt at the idea that wages, labor, and money dominate everything, modern economic life being as it is, but asks, ". . .and what then?" Altman's attempt to reconcile contradictory lifeworlds in material terms is often trivialized as advocating hunter-gatherer sustainability in the plentiful Arnhem Land tropical savanna, with no broader applicability. But his oeuvre deserves wider consideration as a critical anthropology of development—an international field that indigenist anthropology at large should have ascended but curiously has not.

The dominant logics of Eurocentric modernity likewise infuse such taken-for-granted notions as the necessity of wage labor and schooling as key ingredients for a morally worthy, healthy, and functional life. This is the presumed citizenship model driving current debates about indigenous conditions. Anthropological accounts abound which

square welfare dependency as the culprit behind the endurance of cruddy indigenous life conditions, with associated idea chains about the automatic psychosociality of indolence and the cure of better education and training (e.g., Austin-Broos 2011, Sutton 2009). Such accounts tend to make indigenous lifeworlds synonymous with Euro-Australian (f)acts of governance, with little ethnohistory or "reverse anthropology" (see Kirsch 2006) as foil. What indigenous people make of the epochal categorizations of Western modernity and if they configure their life courses in these terms are underexplored. For all the clear influence of state logics in anthropological framings, only a few anthropologists made the state their principal subject (Kapferer 1988). Adapting the model of following art objects in circulation, tracing the supranational worlds, institutions, and people these bring together and mediate (Ginsburg 2002), abutted firm conceptual walls. Morris's (2000) studies of police encounters stand as sentinel to a general absence of ethnographies of court proceedings, jails, law firms, or the multiple institutions spawned by land and compensation work (but see Burke 2011, Mantziaris & Martin 2000). Yet, as the lawyer David Ritter (2009) remarks, "[T]he total value of [native title] contracts may now be in the billions, the overall numbers of Aboriginal people involved are substantial and some of the corporate parties in question are among the most powerful resource interests in the world" (p. 4).

Similarly, other institutional formations of profound social consequence, such as schools, found greater favor with linguists and educationalists in the contemporary period. Nonetheless, a significant handful of anthropologists made intercultural governmentality the target for sustained ethnographic analysis (for example, Collmann 1988; Cowlishaw 1999; Kowal 2008; Povinelli 2002, 2006; Sullivan 2008, 2011). My own work focused on the circularity of remedial logics and the health bureaucracy's dependency on indigenous ill health for financial and ideological reproduction (Lea 2008). Yet this too remained

a local study that bypassed the multiplicity of intersecting realities and interests, including those of supranational capital, that are also inhabited by service bureaucracies.

BOUND BY THE BINARY

While the cartographic was being redefined by the politico-graphic, others were exploring areas that had nothing to do with land rights per se, if still obedient to domestic formulas. As Australian anthropology's foremost theorist of race relations, Cowlishaw demanded that the discipline critically examine its geographic and racial bias and tacit desires for a "pristine" culture. She represented lives lived with creativity and meaning within historically situated structural confines: missionary and cattle station life for the Rembarrnga in the Northern Territory (1999); racial hostilities and intimacies in outback country towns in New South Wales (1988); and indigenous families scattered in public housing and rental accommodations in the vast suburban sprawl of western Sydney (2009). Yet in asserting the serial joys and indignities of profligacy, aggression, and drinking over the censuring of social deviance models, Cowlishaw was accused of romanticizing the pathological and imagining political resistance where none such prevailed (e.g., Robinson 1997, Rowse 1990). Others also attempted to conceive ways of being indigenous in the face of massive sociocultural disjunctures, using Foucauldian concepts of power as a balancing pole over the pits of cultural relativism and denouncement (e.g., Morris 1989).

Anthropologists of media offered a vital breakaway from these toggles. Michaels's early focus on new media technologies in the indigenous domain was a foil for what he saw as the inherent conservatism of Australian anthropology and the ideological state complex it served (Michaels 1994). He invited anthropologists to see the sociopolitical possibilities of such expressive technologies as art, radio, film, television, and now social networking (Biddle 2007; Christen 2009; Fisher 2009; Ginsburg 1994; von Sturmer 1989, 2009). For reasons

that remain unclear, Michaels's work was celebrated more within cultural studies than within establishment anthropology (O'Regan 1990). Even so, a generation of ethnographers inherited—and contested—his iconic legacy to innovative ends.

Deger's film collaborations, for instance, reveal how the media philosophies of Bangana, a Yolngu man from Gapuwiyak in northeast Arnhem Land, challenge prevailing theories about representation and cultural (re)constitution (Deger 2006, 2011). Like Michaels, Deger rejects the idea that providing technical equipment through state-sponsored programs will automatically foster cultural sustenance, or conversely that the co-option of such technologies is necessarily corrupting (see also Ginsburg 1994, 2011; but also Weiner 1997). Yet her approach to indigenous aesthetics and meaning making takes us beyond the limits of Michaels's semiotics. Revealing a thoroughly coeval ontology but avoiding the condescension of a projected counterculture, Deger shows how Yolngu experiments with media production and reception assert "the primacy of the ancestral as a source of foundational orientation in the world" (Deger 2006, p. 78). As Ginsburg further reveals (e.g., Ginsburg 1994, 2002, 2010, 2011), the pathologizing gaze of state-inflected anthropologies has long been destabilized textually, digitally, and visually within indigenous cultural productions and ethnographic media (see also Langton 1993, McLean 2011). Ginsburg's own work fuses cutting-edge discussion of transcultural regimes of mediatic visuality and the politics of practice-based advocacy. She reminds us that the groundbreaking film *Two Laws* (Strachan et al. 1981) changed the paradigm of representation with its indigenous point of view, narrative flow, and wide-angle lens—both literal and figurative (Ginsburg 2008). It opened avenues that indigenous films subsequently recharted—from *Ten Canoes* (de Heer & Djigirr 2006) to *Samson and Delilah* (Thornton 2009) and *Toomelah* (Sen 2011)—challenging anthropological authority along the way.

MARCHING TO INTERNATIONAL TUNES

To suggest land repatriation work parochialized indigenist anthropology into conceptual correspondence with bureaucratic categories is not to say new theories in international circulation were ignored. The need to rectify the predominance of information on men, by men, was immediately apparent. The concerns of second-wave feminism brought to the fore the questions of why, if gender is a sociocultural construct, women are universally oppressed, and study turned to the gender orders of stateless groups to repudiate this seeming inevitability. Australian material showcased indigenous women's fierce independence and agency (Gale 1983): from a Marxist consideration of who owned the means of production (Hamilton 1975) and female autonomy in ritual and everyday contexts (Bell 1983, Dussart 2000) through to explorations of women's sexuality, abortion, infanticide, and child rearing (Cowlishaw 1981, Hamilton 1981). The contemporary period also saw the emergence of interest in indigenous masculinities (compared with generic man as society), notably explored by Davis in the cattle stations of the Kimberly (Davis 2004a) and in the Torres Strait (2004b).

Only Bell's (1983) *Daughters of the Dreaming* was destined to become a classic. Although Françoise Dussart's diligent ethnography balanced Bell's more ideological claims (Dussart 2000), Bell's text better matched the prevailing desire for gatherer-hunters to represent an emancipatory and recuperable primal type. In the meantime, Burbank's careful account of aboriginal female-initiated violence and aggression was more or less bypassed (Burbank 1994). As Strathern (1987) noted, adding women in as subjects was simultaneously a radical contribution and a reconstitution of the discipline's key ordering devices: reproduction, sexual practice, inheritance, kinship, and divisions of labor. Issues of gender have since been subsumed by theories of sexuality, postcoloniality, and liberal governance, whereas the emergence

of queer theory in the same period could not breach indigenist anthropology's area studies bulwarks. An exception is Povinelli's *The Empire of Love* (2006), which shows the intersection between discourses of primitivity, distributions of life and death, and the compromised immune systems of the "at risk" with something as seemingly private and unthreatening as kissing one's partner adieu on a New York doorstep.

The excited attention to literariness in 1980s ethnographic critiques likewise found only patchy reception in indigenist anthropology. Where the novelist Hooper (2008) channeled Truman Capote to explore the fatal police bashing of an indigenous man held in custody at Palm Island, anthropologists in the main have resisted such techniques (but see Cowlishaw 2009; Jackson 1995; Muecke 2004; von Sturmer 1995, 2009). *Reading the Country* (Benterrak et al. 1984) was arguably the first experimental or postmodern ethnography, but its lead writer Stephen Muecke would not claim himself to be an anthropologist. Almost alone in this period, Biddle took up the challenge of writing experimentally, without relegating feminist concerns to a modernist past tense. Repeatedly risking dismissal as a proper anthropologist, Biddle's interrogations of sensory modalities and the drama of encounter led to ficto-critical explorations of such themes as the anthropologist's body (1993) or shame (1997) and on to the first sustained analysis of Western Desert women's art. Biddle argues that when Warlpiri women of the central desert paint their skin with ancestral designs, body and canvas are more than mere surface (2007, pp. 61–75). They shimmer with potency, are inscribed with literate intent, and transform visual painting into a performance of imminent political exigencies (also Biddle 2000).

Certain technologies have also been powerfully brought into anthropological view to show how objects mediate social relations: vehicles, acrylic painting, computers, film, radio, and video (Fisher 2009; Frederick & Stefanoff 2011; Myers 1988; Peterson 2000; Redmond 2011; Stotz 2001). At the same time, the technological determinants of built space seem so deeply embedded that they resist analysis: Quarries, plumbing systems, building regulations, electrical systems, or room layouts tend to be ignored (see Lea & Pholeros 2010). Such absences make Memmot's (2007) comprehensive account of Australian aboriginal architecture all the more distinct. Inverting the notion that indigenous people lacked houses and settlements when Europeans first reached Australian shores, Memmot also challenges the widespread evolutionary perspective that makes permanent buildings the sign of a more completed stage of modernization. Still, given its force in sedimenting hierarchized life conditions at structural and intimate scales, the relative neglect of civic infrastructure is peculiar. It hints of an evolutionary residue that measures change in terms of the diffusion and uptake of manifestly novel material forms. Perhaps it also explains why science and technology (STS) approaches, mined so profitably within indigenist history and philosophy (Anderson 2002, Clark 2009, Verran et al. 2007), enjoy limited traction within indigenist anthropology. And, lacking STS, why the militarization of the Asia Pacific region, as much part of indigenous dispossession as is mining or agriculture, is not analyzed as a social force at all.

Even the subfield of indigenous medical anthropology avoids contemporary theories of the "more-than-human" in accounting for the differentiated distribution of lethalities. Instead, as with broader sociocultural anthropology, it is now ensnared by the political transformation of indigenous people into failed citizens. Influenced by the "harm-minimization" and community development emphases of public health, medical anthropologists advocated better access to services, cross-cultural communication, and indigenous control to remedy the too-early deaths, chronic diseases, and high trauma loads of indigenous populations (Saggers & Gray 1991) and innocently emphasized the cultural specificity of health understandings (McCoy 2008, Reid 1983, Saethre 2007). State policy

swiftly appropriated these seemingly benign framings through outsourcing to indigenous-controlled and other nongovernment organizations, medicalizing poverty through population targeting and case-managing individuals as objects of civil and bio-disability. Issue-specific health ethnographies inadvertently map such interventionist concerns as teenage pregnancies (Senior & Chenhall 2008), alcohol and other drug use (Brady 1992, Chenhall 2007, McKnight 2002), and indigenous stress as a social determinant of morbidity (Burbank 2011). The social determinants of disease approach is at once congruent with anthropological principles in taking a holistic view of health, while remaining the key rationale for "Closing The Gap"—a name for the government's indigenous health strategy and the (retrospective) grounds for The Intervention. Sources of harm are, in practice, thus isolated from forces that stratify, even as power relations appear to be named. Psychoanalytic anthropology, such as Robinson's (1995, 2005) raw accounts of suicide, death, family formations, and psychopathology on the Tiwi Islands, resists these formulaic projections (also Eickelkamp 2004, Morton 1987, Munn 2003). Robinson is not indifferent to suffering or interventionary desires to make better, but his work is driven by the rareness of intimate and longstanding ethnohistorical knowledge of Tiwi lifeworlds.

FROM OTHER TO OTHERWISE

If the start of the era of cultural recognition of the other began with Stanner and was made contemporary by Myers, it might well end with Sutton's (2009) authoritative recasting of indigenous cultural difference as the problem. Like Stanner, Sutton began his career as a classical linguist and ethnographer who in old age shifted to a more mournful gaze on present-day social conditions. The comparison ends here. Whereas Stanner maintained faith in indigenous alterity, Sutton names indigenous traditions and the predations of welfare as part of a social deathscape. Scathingly polemic, he

accused myopic baby-boomer anthropologists of a fatally soft cultural relativism. But as this review has shown, sociocultural anthropology, conservative or otherwise, has been chained to something more difficult again: how to show ways of being indigenous under conditions of liberal settler colonialism (Wolfe 2007). In this pursuit, the unifying force was not problem deflation and lack of policy attunement. If anything, it was an unreflexive faith in the state as an external entity to which one might appeal with putatively sound scholarly reason and for assumed indigenous benefit (see Lea 2012). Indeed, far from ignoring policy concerns, efforts to write of what exceeds the functional values of hired labor, myths of state, and monetization have been rare (see Burbank 2006, von Sturmer 1995).

That said, a new generation of scholars is exploring modes of being indigenous in contemporary Australia without giving closure—and so denying the authority of pronouncement. While not operating to any collective manifesto, the work of (to name a few) Biddle, Deger, Eickelkamp (2011), Fisher, Glaskin (2008, 2011), Redmond, Musharbash, and Young (2005, 2011) is distinguished from old-guard contemporary anthropologies in its shared commitment to what Povinelli calls "a dwelling science" (E.A. Povinelli, unpublished data), referring to an insistence that living otherwise still matters. It is the nascent conceptual approach rather than geographical bias that defines this emergent work, including its embrace of the radical collaborative potential best showcased in multimedia anthropology (see also von Sturmer 1989, 2009).

For his clear influence, Sansom's work (1980, 1995, 2010) can be placed alongside that of Myers and Michaels in powerfully forging new approaches: in Sansom's case for the indigenous people who live in the margins, public housing enclaves, and hinterlands of the Top End of Australia. His monograph, *The Camp at Wallaby Cross* (Sansom 1980), took readers into the rich, lively, resourceful, humorous, and sickness-laden world of fringe camp life. He

did not foreclose analysis through accounting for (or denying) deficits but rendered details open to interpretive possibility through attentive, lyrical description. We are made witness to the forbidding obstacles to cultural vitality, the power of policing and welfare, and the force of land appropriation—that is, the dense structuring of possibilities in threshold spaces—without morally laden and ethnospecific models of epidemiological or sociohistorical cause and effect to sink the analysis. His work, like that of the new generation, is a form of advocacy that destabilizes by representing (as nearly as can be achieved) what is, as it is, how it has come to pass, in its own terms.

This kind of coeval analysis, with its attempted sidestepping of governmental rationalities, is also sometimes achieved by taking a piece of welfarist logic seriously as ethnographic subject. Take Yasmine Musharbash's interrogation of the concept of "boredom" (2007), long a key word in denigrations of indigenous youth, or her close analysis of sleeping arrangements in situations otherwise described as "overcrowded" (2009), where, reflecting Myers's work on personhood, she shows us that decisions on who sleeps next to whom reflect the tensions and affections of everyday life in Yuendumu. Although the idea of such temporally sensitive negotiations can be seen in other cultural contexts—for instance, in the sit-com cliché of sleeping on the sofa to signal the frozen sexuality of immediate marital discord—in Yuendumu we are in a women's-only camp of bedrolls, kids, dogs, and blankets. It is telling, then, that in the moment of contradicting the governmental verdict of overcrowding by detailing the intimate agency of spatial configurations, Musharbash's analysis is criticized for its failure to address policy priorities directly (e.g., Finlayson 2011).

It is such relentless pressure toward governmentally annexed "usefulness" that most powerfully shapes contemporary indigenist anthropologies. Over the authority of ethnography has come a demand for bureaucratic authorization. Yet in my view, the vexed notion of relevance is best stated as a paradox: Contemporary anthropologies of indigenous Australia have most to add when no such pragmatic address is explicitly intended.

DEEP ETHNOGRAPHY AS THE NEW RADICAL

I noted at the outset that the failure of anthropology was its inability, or its unwillingness, to challenge the teleological narratives that bolster the West's deeply assumed sense of superiority. The latent expectation has been that indigenous societies have to open themselves to the world, not the other way around. This failure might yet be arrested. The potential to do so lies within (mixed-media) collaborations based on living alongside and yielding to networks and relationships, sharing cups and illnesses, learning languages and codes, and attending politically to distributed differentialities, not as colonial intermediaries but as cocreators. This is to reassert unabashedly the cultural critique possible in deep ethnography, alongside a willingness to embrace the demands, openings, and restrictions that collaborations with indigenous people require—especially given the reputation anthropology now carries as an imperial knowledge form (see also Hage 2011, Viveiros de Castro 2004). This could be seen as reassertion of an anachronistic argument about the importance of "thick description" and bodily immersion, using the shock of difference to transcend hegemonic concepts (Kapferer 2007). But such work also requires a foundational rethinking of anthropology, its methods, authoring, theories, and outcomes. As Myers (2006) put it, "The simplicity of the us/them dyad—assumed in the flow of cultural translation from 'them' to 'us'—is no longer sustainable" (p. 235). Expansive engagement with other disciplines grappling with the intensifications of the Anthropocene and the differentiated distributions of contemporary conditions of life—such as contemporary financial analysis, geography, environmental science, oceanography, defense, and securitization studies—is a necessary condition.

And extension beyond the parochialisms of the indigenous/nonindigenous binary and the two-step approach of bureau-anthropological concerns is critical.

To the reaction that it is too grandiose an ambition for anthropology to alter the West's sense of itself through ethnography, I would say, if not anthropology's task, then whose?

SUMMARY POINTS

1. Anthropologies of indigenous Australia did not penetrate the West's latent sense of civilizational superiority in any transformational way. Doing so remains a challenge and opportunity.

2. Current debates within the discipline pivot around whether anthropology ought, or ought not, be impacting on indigenous policy formulation. But this falsely implies that indigenist anthropology has not been interacting with the public culture of the state from the get-go, across the full range of anthropology's theoretical emergences, shifts, and de/formations.

3. Even the uptakes and refusals of certain international theoretical threads, the visibility of some materialities over others, show the contours of indigenist anthropology's ongoing but unrecognized imbrication in the cultural logics of the state.

4. Works that have the most to say to questions of policy are paradoxically those that care less about policy's immediate concerns.

5. A newer generation is showing signs of the transformational anthropologies that might yet be generated from the Antipodes. Shunning ephemeral moral crises in favor of immersed ethnography, such works show signs of moving toward a contemporary ethic of politicized collaboration.

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