



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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including: Elkin, A.P. Thompson, Caroline Tennant Kelly, Lloyd Warner, C. W. M. Hart, W. E. H. Stanner, Olive Pink and the Berndts (Catherine and Ronald). Each of the chapters examines the situation that researchers faced: in order to gain access to “the field”, to work among Australian Aboriginal people, or in Papua or New Guinea, a researcher needed the say-so not of the people themselves (as is the case with institutions and ethics committees today) but the government officers and missionaries who were the administrators of “the natives” lives. The “cautious silence” of Gray’s title is demonstrated most in these chapters; where the matter of access to remote mission or government settlements and the matter of financial support of projects of investigation were dependent on agents of the state and church both near and far. When the “project” of government and mission was one of assimilation, anthropological research that challenged these goals was bold indeed. These elements of the volume may interest Indigenous educators, whose work is closely tied both to “community” and to the state, and must face difficult questions around one’s funding, one’s support base or employer and one’s politics. However, I fear that the focus on particular characters in the history of the discipline of anthropology will be of interest to anthropologists and those with links to the discipline, but few others.

The third section of the book (Part 3) includes two quite different chapters: the first details anthropologists’ involvement in northern Australian war efforts (or in the case of the Berndts, avoiding direct involvement) and as advisors to government officials about Papua and New Guinea. Given that the pivot of much of Gray’s thesis is on the figure of A.P. Elkin, it is fitting that the final chapter revolves around a story of Elkin’s challenged and then diminished influence on the activities of anthropologists, culminating in his resignation from the Australian Board of missions in 1947 (p. 215) and retreat into “behind the scenes” work from academia (p. 216). I found these chapters the least interesting of Gray’s work, and his introduction to this part of the book conveys a weariness about the whole subject.

Gray’s is not simply a critique of the discipline of anthropology, it is also openly critical, and most prominently so when reviewing the decisions of anthropologists to study “culture”, social organisation, and “traditional life”, rather than conditions imposed on Indigenous peoples under colonial administration and through Australian government policy. However, contrary to this criticism, Gray’s work demonstrates a range of approaches to academic pursuits among anthropologists. The author briefly considers the fact that the political thrust of many anthropologists has been liberal left (even “radical” p. 22), as well as the work that could generally be considered activist, such as Caroline Tennant Kelly’s (p. 127) and aspects of W.E.H. Stanner’s (p. 143ff). Some of the work Gray mentions in his Afterword, despite Elkin’s overseeing

of it, was activist in its substance (while, certainly, “of its time” in its language). The politics of Australian anthropology, then, has always been rather mixed. Like other social sciences, it is largely of its time; but the best works are those that produce a critique which has the capacity to challenge existing knowledge.

Built as it is of his published articles since 1994 (see bibliography, pp. 263–4), most of Gray’s work will come as no surprise to those who have followed the progress of the chapters through Australian journals. I found that the concluding paragraph of the Afterword incorporates some substantially outdated critique of anthropology, and would have found this acceptable if written in past tense. However, Gray writes as though his critique pertains to the present, which fails to really capture the fact that so many anthropologists (not just in Australia, but also in comparable colonial contexts) are now (and have been for some time) incorporating Indigenous peoples’ critiques into their works and are collaborating with Aboriginal peoples for a research that is meaningful for all concerned. Furthermore, the documentary work of anthropologists such as those Gray mentions throughout *A Cautious Silence*, have been used extensively by Indigenous peoples for many different purposes, not least for land and “native title” claims, and certainly for the purposes of cross-cultural education. I am not asserting that anthropologists are without fault: far from it. Rather, I argue that as researchers, in order to examine the politics of the past, we must be quite clear that our politics are of the present.

Thus, I suggest that Gray’s work is of considerable importance in demonstrating the detail of engagements between the discipline of anthropology and Australian government, especially concerning policy formulated “for the benefit of” Indigenous people. It illustrates in useful detail how not to go about doing research with, for and among Indigenous people, but says little about how to read from this a hopeful future for social science in Australia.

THE 1967 REFERENDUM: RACE, POWER AND THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION (2ND ED.)

Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus (Eds.)
Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2007, viii+188pp,
ISBN 978 0 85575 555 3

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Words do matter. During the recent debate over the Labor Government’s apology to Stolen Generations

passed by the Commonwealth Parliament in February 2008, the more vocal critics and skeptics claimed that action was needed, not words. Words, they argued, would not fix health problems, sexual and alcohol abuse, poverty and unemployment in Aboriginal communities. Ironically it is often the same voices that claim that words are not important who are very keen to demand allegiance to the flag, know the words of the national anthem, speak English, and know basic facts about Australian history.

But words do matter. Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus's *The 1967 Referendum: Race Power and the Australian Constitution* highlights the power and significance of words and symbolic actions, even if words are sometimes misunderstood and misinterpreted.

The 1967 referendum is regarded as a turning point in Indigenous relations in Australia. It is widely understood that the referendum granted Aboriginal people the right to vote and citizenship rights. But as Attwood and Markus demonstrate, the referendum did neither. Indeed, it was quite limited in its scope.

This book explores at length what the referendum was really about from a legal and constitutional perspective. The referendum, which was passed with the greatest majority with more than 90 percent voting "yes", was quite limited in its scope. First, Section 127, which excluded Aboriginal people from being counted in the census, was repealed. Secondly, section 51 (p. xxvi) was amended to allow the Commonwealth to enact "special laws" in relation to Aboriginal people. This amendment did not *compel* the Commonwealth to make laws regarding Aboriginal people. Moreover, the constitution did not specifically prohibit the Commonwealth from being proactive in Aboriginal affairs. Rather, the Commonwealth had left the responsibilities for Aboriginal affairs to the states.

The referendum was held on 21 May 1967 after a protracted campaign led by the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement and other groups. Bain and Attwood explore in detail the attempts by a range of organisations that began less than a decade after federation urging the Commonwealth to take a greater responsibility for Aboriginal affairs. The 1967 was the culmination of this extended campaign.

This background is important to understand why the referendum, which technically did not grant any significant new powers to the Commonwealth or significantly alter the legal status of Aboriginal people, has been regarded as a "landmark" or "turning point" in Aboriginal affairs in Australia. As Bain and Attwood demonstrate, despite the misunderstanding and at times misrepresentation by the "Yes" advocates, the outcome of the referendum was interpreted more broadly and its impact was much more than simply deleting or altering words in the constitution. They argue that it was critical to major reforms instigated by the Whitlam government.

The referendum bestowed upon the Whitlam government and its successors the moral authority required to expand the Commonwealth's role in Aboriginal affairs and to implement a major program of reform. Without this mandate, the Whitlam government could never have done what it did. Here lies the primary historical significance of the referendum (p. 64).

Thus the referendum was infused with symbolism and even mythic qualities that went beyond the reality in that it did not grant Aboriginal people citizenship rights or the right to vote, or abolish racially discriminatory laws.

This publication is a second edition. The first was published in 1997 to coincide with the 30 years commemoration of the 1967 referendum. Normally publication of a second edition, particularly one 10 years later, would be considered a lesser event and worthy of only a passing comment. In this case the second edition could be considered of greater value. Bain and Attwood have added a chapter on events during the years of the Howard government. They highlight changes in attitudes and perceptions, demonstrating that historical discourse is never complete or fixed but in part responds to contemporary events.

The second section of this publication is no less important than the first. It comprises a series of documents, oral sources and contemporary Aboriginal perspectives. All demand close attention. The written source present a range of perspectives on the extended campaign from an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1911 on the need for the Commonwealth to become involved in Aboriginal affairs to a media release in July 1998 by former Prime Minister Howard on the 1967 referendum. The oral sources comprise reflections by Aboriginal people on the 1967 referendum from interviews gathered in 1997. They highlight the divergent memories and perceptions about the referendum.

The 1967 Referendum: Race Power and the Australian Constitution is essential reading for any student of Aboriginal policy in the 21st century in providing a concise but thorough analysis of the 1967 referendum. But is also important for highlighting wider issues. This book is a reminder of the views about Aboriginal people when the constitution was being framed in the late 19th century. Today, it seems unthinkable that Aboriginal people were not counted in the census. It also is a salutary reminder that despite significant advances in redressing basic injustices, some of the appalling conditions that prompted action in the 1950s still exist in Australia.

Regardless of what significance the reader might attach to the event, the book is a reminder that words and symbolism do matter. Perhaps it was put no better than Chicka Dixon in the *Sun Herald* on 21 May 1967 just before the referendum:

There's a simple reason why I want a huge "Yes" vote on the Aboriginal question at next Saturday's referendum: *I want to be accepted by white Australians as a person.*

For Dixon, the referendum was not an exercise in constitutional reform, but an affirmation by white Australians that he was a human being.

RESHAPING THE UNIVERSITY: RESPONSIBILITY, INDIGENOUS EPISTEMES, AND THE LOGIC OF THE GIFT

Rauna Kuokkanen

University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2007, vii+248pp, ISBN 978 0 7748 1356 0

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Rauna Kuokkanen prefaces her book with a description of the river Deatnu and the lives of her Sami people, who live beside the river. The river forms a link between people as well as being a border between Norway and Finland that artificially divides Sami people into different citizenships. She takes a deconstructive approach to exploring the relationship between coloniser and colonised, that she finds reflected in the fluidity of the Deatnu. Moreover, she takes seriously Jacques Derrida's idea that deconstruction is hospitality, a way of welcoming the other and acting responsibly toward the other. The scholarship here is vast and meticulous, generously sympathetic and critical. Kuokkanen engages with Indigenous, postcolonial, feminist, literary, and continental discourses. Short literary excerpts are also placed in the text as another mode of theorising for the readers to reflect upon. She writes that she is "interested in Spivak's notions of productive crisis and interruption: the idea of bringing various, even opposing discourses together in such a way that they critically interrupt one another" (p. xiv). Furthermore, her experience and the experiences of other Indigenous people are essential to her construction of theory. Although she acknowledges myriad differences between Aboriginal peoples, Kuokkanen argues that "whatever their historical, political, social, economic and geographical differences, the world's indigenous peoples share certain experiences of colonialism as well as certain

fundamental values and way of viewing the world" (p. 11). The project in the book is to sketch an approach that will interrupt dominant academic discourses. Kuokkanen's own experiences of finding it difficult to speak and be understood when expressing Indigenous epistememes outside Indigenous studies courses stimulated her to write.

For Kuokkanen, the core issue is "the sanctioned ignorance of the academy at large" (p. 1). This ignorance is both sanctioned and, in a sense, a willful ignorance as even well-meaning people avoid discovering more about Indigenous philosophies. She makes a distinction between epistemologies – views concerning the nature of knowledge – and epistememes, which include these views, worldviews in general, ontologies and ethics. Unlike Michel Foucault, she believes that epistememes can be concurrent (p. 58) and argues that Indigenous epistememes based on an engagement with the world must be embraced by the university. These epistememes differ from Eurocentric ones in being "relational, participatory, and narrative modes of being in and knowing the world" (p. 121). Epistemic ignorance may take the form of not knowing at all or the form of devaluing Indigenous knowledge, such as relegating Native American literature to the anthropology department (p. 69). Central to the book is an examination of Derrida's work on the impossibility of the gift (1992). Kuokkanen, while finding Derrida's analysis of the gift extremely useful, criticises Derrida and develops her own understanding of the logic of the gift. This discussion of Derrida on the gift is extremely productive in providing a critical perspective on his work. For Kuokkanen, the gift as such is only impossible within a non-Indigenous framework and the gift of Indigenous philosophies is only impossible because of the epistemic ignorance of the academy (p. 7). If Aboriginal worldviews are taken seriously, Kuokkanen argues, the gift is possible and even more, it is necessary. Although the gift enables a critique of the logic of exchange, she concedes that her conception of the gift does not entirely undermine the exchange paradigm (p. xiv). Kuokkanen sees the gift as a way of understanding how institutions could exemplify a greater openness or hospitality to Indigenous epistememes. For her, "The logic of the gift foregrounds a new relationship – one that is characterized by reciprocity and by a call for responsibility to the 'other'" (p. 2). This new relationship has to be one that profoundly alters the western and European orientation of universities, which is reflected in intellectual traditions and disciplinary boundaries.

The gift is both practice and paradigm, and Kuokkanen explores both these aspects of the gift in her work. To develop her critique of Derrida, Kuokkanen describes examples drawn from her own experience, that of Native Americans, the Indigenous people of British Columbia in Canada, and others.