Time, indigeneity, and peoplehood: the postcolony in Australia

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Online publication date: 08 February 2010

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Introduction

The Australian federal government's military and bureaucratic 'intervention' into the remote Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory, announced in June 2007, has represented the most dramatic state-initiated episode in Indigenous affairs in the last quarter-century. Its official title, 'Northern Territory National Emergency Response', reflects the rhetoric of urgency to interdict reported widespread sexual abuse of children that had been publicized in government investigations and media reports in the preceding year.[1] The drastic measures that Parliament enacted—changes to welfare payments, Indigenous land tenure, community governance, policing, and customary law—also came in the wake of mounting concern in many circles, including among anthropologists, about other problems, such as endemic substance abuse-related violence, mismanagement, and economic stagnation.[2]

Although the term '*humanitarian* intervention' has not been invoked, its connotation of coercive action in the name of human rights protection has been echoed in the Australian discourse about the 'intervention', as it is commonly called, into these remote communities, where the rights of children have been the paramount and unimpeachable pretext driving policy. Yet the government response troubled many commentators because it set aside the Racial Discrimination Act (1975) so that it could legislate specifically about Indigenous people in the Northern Territory to compulsorily manage their welfare income, acquire and control their community land, deploy military and police personnel, and appoint government community managers. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, an official, government-funded anti-discrimination body, criticized the intervention for breaching this legislation, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur largely agreed with such domestic protest when he visited Australia in August 2009.[3] As might be expected, most Indigenous leaders and non-Indigenous oppositional intellectuals attacked the intervention, raising the spectre of neo-assimilation, neo-paternalism, neo-liberalism and even genocide. The media's obsessive focus on 'Aboriginal dysfunction', many critics claimed, obscured White Australia's own identity anxieties, its hegemonic project of domination, its denial of unrelinquished Indigenous sovereignty and its tendency to pathologize Aboriginal culture and normalize its own.[4] One prominent critic spoke of an 'ongoing race war against Indigenous people'.[5]

But some Indigenous leaders were sympathetic to the government's position. The dysfunction of many Indigenous communities is all too real, they insisted. To reject paternalist government measures, even if they are politically opportunistic, would affect Indigenous survival in parts of the country. Inverting the usual compatibility between Indigenous and leftist political fronts, these figures, above all Noel Pearson and Marcia Langton, have accused white progressives of infantalizing Indigenous people by casting them as agentless victims of colonialism and rendering them dependent on welfare and white liberal beneficence—much to the delight of conservatives who claim that their positions have been vindicated. Langton, Pearson, and others have even begun to criticize the aspiration for land rights and 'self-determination' or 'self-management' of remote Indigenous communities as ends in themselves. The problems of these communities—sexual abuse, alcoholism and unemployment—cannot be ascribed solely to state policies and effects of colonialism, they claim: Indigenous peoples are co-responsible for their predicament.[6] For breaking ranks, Langton and Pearson have been denounced as 'noisy but marginal individuals' by Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders and intellectuals who oppose the intervention. For her part, Langton, who readily conceded the intervention's problems, reported the difficulty of receiving 'abuse . . . from Aboriginal people who are locked in a fantasy land about Aboriginal sovereignty'.[7]

In this article, I explore the dilemma of self-critique, solidarity, and group survival posed by the intervention via an examination of the intense Australian Aboriginal discussion about 'Indigeneity'.[8] I do so through the lens of a parallel, if not completely commensurable development—Achille Mbembe's critique of postcolonial African states. For the past fifteen years, the Cameroonian philosopher has been advancing a highly original auto-critique of African black racial identity and nationalism that tries to avoid the trap of exculpating colonialism and confirming the prejudices of white racists. He developed the concept of the 'postcolony' to interrogate the grim challenges of African states; their failure to fulfil the promises of decolonization and independence, and their endemic instability and violence.[9] Like Pearson and Langton, he was denounced for betraying the cause of black liberation.[10]

At first glance, this choice of lens is inappropriate. Discussions of race and Indigenous people in Australia usually invoke a settler colonial paradigm, mentioning the Anglophone settler colonies in New Zealand and North America in particular.[11] This is the obvious choice given that the logics of European rule and disengagement in settler colonies differ from those of other forms of colonial rule, such as in Africa. Even in the few settler colonies of Africa, such as South Africa and Zimbabwe, the white colonists never threatened to demographically overwhelm the Indigenous inhabitants, which meant that decolonization was a realistic possibility there, whereas many Australian Aborigines, a tiny minority of some 2.5 per cent of the population, still feel subjected to a colonial system of relationships. Significantly, post-World War II decolonization in Africa and Asia meant self-determination for its majority populations rather than minorities. If

states on those continents are now 'postcolonial', Australia remains a settler colonial entity.[12]

For all the differences between settler colonial states and the African successor states of the European empires, however, some important parallels are identifiable in the debates among their black intelligentsias. If in Africa and Australia, the language of decolonization was (and often remains) suffused by the grammar of cultural distinctiveness, anti-imperial resistance and liberation, new voices can be heard that are challenging these terms of political struggle and collective self-understanding. The similarity of mood and sobriety among these revisionist intellectuals, and the co-temporality of their work, has not been registered so far.

The question of racial identity—cast in terms of 'Indigeneity'—is a central trope through which many Aboriginal intellectuals frame the current crisis. After outlining Mbembe's critique of this trope, I show that most Indigenous Australian intellectuals do not find his style of post-racialized identity intellectually interesting or politically useful. The difficulty in following Mmembe's example, I suggest, is that the status of Aborigines as a tiny minority in a settler society calls forth the very language of survival and autochthonous authenticity that he and others seek to surmount. While the experience of disintegration is intense, the dissident voices, like Pearson, Langton and others, find little resonance within the black intelligentsia and political class, although they may become celebrated by the broader white settler culture as heroic gadflies.[13]

These debates, it must be said, are largely metropolitan affairs about nationally-framed questions of public policy, political strategy and ideology, rather than about the lives of actual Aboriginal communities, of which many commentators, including this writer, have little or no direct experience. Not only are these debates far removed from their grassroot realities, they can grossly simplify local experience by positing polarities that do not obtain there. As the anthropologist Gillian Cowlishaw has noted, the discussion 'about Indigenous issues thrives on moral and political binaries, creating a facade of unified positions, a series of left/right orthodoxies that caricature the complexity of racialized relationships being lived out across the nation'.[14] And yet, if the inhabitants of those communities are justly perplexed by the acrimony and generalizations of these debates, the local and the national are not necessarily hermetically sealed realms. The political languages articulated in the broader public sphere contribute to shaping the terms of self-understanding at all levels, as carefully articulated positions become congealed into striking slogans (e.g. 'culture won't save us'; 'they're still blaming Captain Cook'),[15] just as, in turn, these languages are mediated by the experiences of remote communities, especially for Indigenous intellectuals and anthropologists with strong connections to them.[16]

Achille Mbembe's African postcolony

The concept of the postcolony was introduced to English-speaking readers in a 1992 article by Mbembe, and subsequently incorporated into a book

bearing that name.[17] In the interests of comparison with Australia, I focus only on his critique of nativist temporality and subjectivity, omitting the book's treatment of political economy and reconfiguration of the state into spaces of 'indirect private government'. Postcolonies are 'societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves'. Materially, they comprise 'corporate institutions' and 'political machinery' that are penetrated and in part shaped by western neo-liberal imperatives and intervention. Above all, '*they constitute a distinctive regime of violence*'.[18] Mbembe distinguishes his term from the well-known neologisms 'postcolonial' and 'postcolonialism', which he thinks cannot account for the contemporary African predicament. His critique is worth quoting at length, because it demonstrates his intention to move beyond the tradition of revolutionary black/African manifestos.

> But by insisting too much on difference and alterity, this current of thought [postcolonialism] has lost sight of the weight of the fellow human (*le semblable*) without whom it is impossible to imagine an ethics of the neighbour, still less to envisage the possibility of a common world, of a common humanity. On the other hand, insofar as postcolonial theory has considered the struggle between Father and Son—that is to say, the relationship between colonizer and colonized—to be the most significant political and cultural paradigm in formerly colonized societies, it has tended to overshadow the intensity of the violence of brother towards brother and the status of the sister and the mother in the midst of fratricide. In passing, it has clouded our understanding of the relationship between sovereignty, homicide, fratricide, and suicide.[19]

His concern, then, is not to continue the Fanonian anti-colonial motif, but to subject the violent social and cultural formation of post-independence Africa to a new kind of analysis.[20]

Such an analysis means, *inter alia*, not adhering to Afrocentric, emancipation narratives about a 'distinctive genius' of the 'black race'. History, Mbembe avers, provides the former colonized or colonizer no solace. Absolute power arbitrarily rules the lives of millions in the postcolony, the right to kill brothers and sisters is now invested in African sovereignty itself, mocking the conceit of authenticity and liberation. To be sure, the rule of violence was born with colonialism and the slave trade, where 'phallic domination' was integral to the '*process of brutalization*'. But to condemn western exploitation alone is now a politically fruitless exercise because it no longer facilitates the '*possibility of an autonomous African subject*'. In fact, anti-colonial rhetoric now contributes to 'the problem of freedom from servitude'. Mbembe wants to know what has become of the promise of self-determination after decolonization.[21]

Mbembe highlights gender in the postcolony, where 'naked predation and the brutality of horror have taken a phantasmal, even nightmarish, outer appearance'.[22] The postcolony is a gender order in which masculinity and femininity are constructed by the former's subjugation of the latter. The maximization of power is a politics of virility, holding, controlling and consuming 'feminine assets'. Mbembe goes so far as to compare the

political-psychic life of the polis to an erect penis, seeking to extend its boundaries and thereby exposing its own limits.[23]

Conventional narratives of liberation, the politics of resistance or disruption in the name of 'agency' cannot adequately account for this gender order, because they do not thematize the limitations of the masculine agent's subjectivity, namely that he was once a slave or 'native'. The postcolony remains caught within the terms of colonization by its inability to imagine the African apart from the west and its primal violence. It is the politics of 'a subject dispossessed of its subjectivity, of its voice, and of its desire by a demonic power of which this subject is the prey'.[24] By highlighting the continuing persistence of the colonial tropes of animality and savagery in the postcolony—in other parts of his book, he expounds on the implosion of governance as well as intra-African violence and exploitation—Mbembe wants to shock other Africans into questioning whether they really have moved beyond colonialism.[25]

His aim is to inculcate an ethics of responsibility by recalling, mourning, accepting and transcending the trauma of colonialism.

> Responsibility I understood not only as an attempt to restore as much as possible the proper name, but also as a response to the name by which one has come to be called and to the fate as well as the promise prescribed by that name. In the case of Africa, it is clear that such a response can only be found from the far side of its very loss and never again in the originary face of the name proper. Indeed, any serious critique of the West entails, of necessity, a critical revisiting of our own fables and the various grammars which, under the pretext of authenticity or radicalism, prosaically turn Africa into yet another fiction.[26]

For that reason, he opposes the national liberation narratives, which displace responsibility for self and community onto the former colonizer. He has no truck, either, with denunciation of the west in order to imagine an 'authentic' African voice with which to tell uniquely African stories, an attempt he regards as lacking philosophical depth and encouraging a debilitating victim cult.[27] Such efforts reinscribe the identity patterns of colonialism.

> Under the guise of 'speaking in one's own voice', then, the figure of the 'native' is reiterated. Boundaries are demarcated between the native and the nonnative Other; and on the basis of these boundaries, distinctions can then be made between the authentic and the inauthentic.[28]

Characteristic of Mbembe's project is his attempt to change African intellectuals' posture to historical time. The problem with the narrative of liberation is that it is 'built around the dual temporality of a glorious—albeit fallen—past (tradition) and a redeemed future (nationalism)' that fail to critically assess Africans' own complicity in their subjection. This 'imprisoning model of history' debilitates Africans because it obscures the continuity of intra-African violence from the colonial period to the present day, permitting a racist equation of blackness, Africanness (authentic belonging), and citizenship.

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> They [racialized differences between black and white] are inscribed within an intellectual genealogy based on a territorialized identity and a racialized geography, the myth of a racial polis obscuring the fact that while the rapacity of global capitalism may be at the origin of the tragedy, Africans' failure to control their own predatory greed and their own cruelty also led to slavery and subjugation.[29]

Instead of leaving the state of slavery or colonial subjection behind, the postcolonies used the same categories, merely inverting the value signs. If blackness and nativism are now positive attributes, they are still racist and thus conceptually and politically impoverished because they fetishize difference as the marker of African humanity rather than celebrate universal or cosmopolitan values.

> When the question was asked, during the heyday of colonialism, whether self-government was possible, it was never to engage the general question of *being* and *time*—in other words, of life—but rather to facilitate native people's struggle to take over the apparatus of the state. The power to risk one's life—that is, in Hegel's terms, the ability to put an end to the servile condition and be reborn as the subject of the world—peters out in the prose of autochthony. And in the end, it can be said that everything here comes down to that one, perverse structure: autochthony.[30]

In an existentialist move—Nietzsche, the young Heidegger, and Deleuze haunt Mbembe's texts[31]—he urges fellow Africans to resist the terror of history and automated responses to colonialism's legacies: the fallacy that 'The present destiny of the continent is supposed to proceed not from free and autonomous choices but from the legacy of a history imposed upon Africans—burned into their flesh by rape, brutality, and all sorts of economic conditionalities.'[32] By recognizing what they have become, they may take responsibility for the past, and then also *consciously* face the challenges of the present and chart a course for the future. Influenced by Henri Bergson's critique of spatialized conceptions of time, Mbembe assails 'African imaginations of the self and the world [that] remain trapped within a conception of identity as geography—in other words, of time as space'.[33] By conceiving of self in time rather than in space, by contrast, this subject can conceive of the future as open to choice rather than as determined by the past. Memory for Bergson, as for Mbembe, is not just recollection of the past, which would entail repetition, but a synthesis of past and present that gestures to the future, a temporality which accounts for novelty, unpredictability and, ultimately, human freedom.[34]

He is asking members of the postcolony fundamental human questions: 'what does it mean to say, "I am a human being", "I am alive", or still, "I exist?" What does one mean when one affirms "the desire to be free" and "the capacity to decide for oneself?"'[35]

> We cannot evade the violent aspects of our history. We have to confront in the same breath the terror visited upon us by racial imperialism as well as our own self-inflicted brutalities. For this to happen, we have to widen the scope of

cultural and political critique and renew the archives of our past and of our present. But there is no way we will overcome the neurosis of victimization if, by transforming the past into our subjective present, we root our identities in injury alone. For the past to become a principle of action in the present, we have to manage to admit the reality of loss and stop living in the past instead of integrating it in to the present as that which must sustain human dialogue. In any case, the complete restitution of the past is not only terrifying, but also a clear impossibility. In order to build a truly cosmopolitan culture in Africa, the present has somewhat to be liberated from the past. It should be clear that I am not advocating the erasure of the past. I am preoccupied with ways in which we can open avenues for memorial practices that foster the work of remembrance—but remembrance as part of the work of freedom, the ultimate ethical frontier. This cannot be achieved through black racial romanticism.[36]

It is important to note that Mbembe is not mimicking the criticisms of white opponents of African nationalisms. He is acutely conscious that the crimes of the apartheid era have gone largely unconfessed and unpunished, and that white privilege persists, facts that in part explain the discord in contemporary South Africa. But a black victim identity is counterproductive: 'The two defensive logics of black victimhood and white denialism . . . foster a culture of mutual *ressentiment*, which, in turn, isolates freedom from responsibility and seriously undermines the prospect of a truly nonracial future.'[37]

Indigeneity and the Australian postcolonies

If Indigenous intellectuals might applaud a 'non-racial' future, because they do not believe in strong notions of race (which is denounced as a western, colonial concept), they might deplore a future without Indigenous cultural difference, because it would entail the non-self-realization, indeed disappearance of their people. The settler colonial structure of Australian society results in an intense attachment to Indigeneity and the historical perspective that underwrites it, because this colonial modality seeks to replace the Indigenous people with a settler presence rather than only or mainly exploit their labour, as in other colonial forms.[38] In such circumstances, one of the few strategies available to Aboriginal intellectuals is making moral claims to survival and, perhaps, some autonomy. The degree to which notions of Indigeneity persist as a discourse of self-identification mirrors the extent to which the labour of self-creation and self-preservation is necessary for a tiny population in the face of a white settler colony determined to assimilate the 'native' other. Cultural survival is, then, a pressing issue for Indigenous leaders and intellectuals.[39]

It is not surprising that a large section of the Indigenous intelligentsia is preoccupied with articulating an emphatic sense of Indigeneity, particularly in the university environment where Aboriginal or Indigenous studies centres have been established only since the 1980s. Indeed, the Indigenous intelligentsia, comprising a striking number of women,[40] is overwhelmingly situated in the academy, a social location that has led to reflection on Indigenous standpoints in relation to what is called 'western knowledge'. This novel

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situation is not always easy to negotiate. Confronted with sometimes racist white students, having to meet the expectations of the others who desire 'postmodern primitivity where an *educated black* speaks "their" English', and needing to rely on western scholarship to teach their subject while balancing the competing imperatives of objectivity and an Indigenous standpoint, Aboriginal academics have reported teaching and research to be a 'sometimes traumatic experience' that can entail 'outrage, pain, anger, humiliation, guilt, anxiety and depression'.[41]

What is more, the academy's norms and imperatives function to accelerate assimilation and can be thereby a technique of 'internal colonialism'.[42] The challenge has been expressed by Eleanor Bourke in the following terms:

> Appropriate education is critical in the survival of Aboriginal Australia but only if it is in harmony with Aboriginal aspirations and cultural contexts. The alternative is to lose Aboriginal values and lifestyles and to become Europeanised. Aboriginal people have to find the balance between gaining the necessary degree of expertise from western education and the enhancement of Aboriginality at the same time.[43]

Defining this balance has been anything but straightforward. This section identifies a number of answers to the question of Indigenous knowledge and identity, ranging from assertive challenges to 'white' epistemology and calls for resistance in the name of unyielded sovereignty, to equally assertive questionings of stark polarities in the name of non-sovereign 'peoplehood'. Put simply, Mbembe's spirit of auto-critique appears in the latter position while the former exemplifies the racialized identity and romantic liberation narrative he seeks to transcend. As might be expected, both approaches differ markedly in their assessment of the federal government 'intervention' into remote Indigenous communities, and in their comportment to time.

Indigeneity as resistance to colonial whiteness

A defiant gesture of resilience is the emotional entailment of the project to invest Aboriginal difference with ontological status. Anita Heiss's poem, 'We Have Survived', captures the sensibility in stark yet elegant terms.

> You may have tried to
>   Eliminate us
>   assimilate us
>   reconciliate us
>
> But you only managed to alienate us.
> And as Indigenous peoples united
> You will never totally
>   eradicate us
>
> For our spirit has survived
> And we will remain, now and forever.[44]

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Ensuring this survival is the task at hand rather than building Mbembe's nonracial polity. The legal scholar Irene Watson speaks for many when she asks, 'How do we, the minority, ensure Aboriginality? If we are cannibalised and utilised to Aboriginalise the majority, how do we as individuals and communities sustain our own vulnerable Aboriginality?'[45] A common strategy is to insist that the sovereignty of the Australian continent remains Indigenous, and that Aborigines have not been defeated. It links Aboriginality to the international Indigenous movement that has emerged since the 1960s. Characterized by a shared sense of victimization by settlers, such movements now engage in 'resistance to the hegemony of nation-states', unlike, say, the African postcolonies, which *are* nation-states.[46] This movement supplies a vocabulary and method for asserting Aboriginality as Indigeneity, as evidenced in the many citations of Native American, Canadian First Nation, African American, and Maori writers. Prominent among them is the Maori academic, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, whose book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) has been hugely influential in Australia and North America.[47] Its purpose has been to provide the intellectual tools to challenge the normative status of western knowledge so as to overcome the 'fragmentation' of Indigenous culture: 'the greater project is about recentreing indigenous identities on a larger scale' after the dislocation wrought by colonialism.[48]

We are witnessing not merely a defence or rescue of extant Indigenous culture, then. This is a project of regeneration, revitalization and rehabilitation. 'For us', writes the Torres Strait Islander academic Martin Nakata, 'the field of Indigenous Studies is part of a broader landscape that includes not just Indigenous Studies, but . . . the rebuilding of Indigenous communities and future.'[49] These are common sentiments in Indigenous circles. 'Indigenist research is research which gives voice to Indigenous people', writes Lester-Irabinna Rigney.[50] For Native American scholars Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel, even their own identity is a process of self-creation: '*being Indigenous* means thinking, speaking and acting with the conscious intent of regenerating one's indigeneity'.[51]

Indigenous scholarship is therefore necessarily activist, and as such runs into western academic protocols of objectivity or neutrality. But that is not all. Western scholarship is experienced as a tool of colonial domination. The scholarly depiction of Aborigines over the centuries has been not only degrading in its arrogant assumption of white superiority; it defines Aboriginality as the negation of whiteness and colonizes knowledge about Aborigines, constraining the imaginaries of Aborigines themselves. The Aborigine has to understand herself with the language of the colonizer in the manner of Du Bois's 'double consciousness' and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*.[52] This consciousness is a burden that non-Indigenous and non-black people can barely appreciate. Reading about 'hybrid' Aborigines as bereft of history and as belonging to neither race, a teenage Ian Anderson experienced 'something like grieving; but a grieving over a tremendous loss which is in itself then denied as being yours'.[53] As might be expected, these Indigenous academics are suspicious of an institutional and cultural

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formation—the academy and modern science—that has been so complicit in the subjugation of their people.

Such suspicion extends to white academics who all too often have taken it upon themselves to 'speak for' Aborigines, thereby compromising Indigenous agency while soothing their consciences. The struggle to claim a voice has extended to feminist circles, where Indigenous women have set clear boundaries about the priorities of race and gender.[54] Above all, white academics, however well-intentioned, could never relate the lived experience of Indigenous people, and this distance told in their historical reconstructions. Wendy Brady echoed a common complaint when she said that she was 'tired of reading about us by people who are concerned about creating a new picture of Australia's past, yet are unable to make the connection with those of us who have experienced it'.[55] Jackie Huggins was making the same point when she wrote that,

> Whites must not ignore this [distance between black and white positions] by taking advantage of their privileged speaking positions to construct an external version of 'us' which may pass for our 'reality'. There must be limits to the ways our worlds are re-written or placed in conceptual frameworks which are not our own.[56]

Such 'imposed labels and structures', writes Michael Dodson, have '[n]early suffocated' Indigenous people.[57] Not for nothing does Linda Tuhiwai Smith begin her book by noting that '"[r]esearch" is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary'.[58]

If these Indigenous scholars sometimes differ in the extent of their hostility to western science, they agree that it should no longer interpellate them as hybrid subjects, part Aboriginal, part non-Aboriginal, but not as emphatically *Indigenous*. It is not surprising, then, that they are hostile to the postcolonial and postmodern trend in the humanities, with its simultaneous celebration of cultural difference—which lends itself all too well to an immigrant settler society—and rejection of essentialisms of any kind, including, by implication, Indigeneity.[59] They want to control knowledge production about Aborigines so that Indigeneity can be (re)constructed. As Dodson puts it, 'Self-representations of Aboriginality are always also acts of freedom.'[60]

One strategy of Indigenous intellectuals has been to place intellectual authority in the hands of particular Aboriginal peoples in the interests of authentic and responsible cultural transmission and survival. Karen L. Martin–Booran Mirraboopa, for example, advocates an Indigenist research program that reflects a distinct Aboriginal ontology of natural and human parity and connectedness. A fully-blown re-enchantment of the world, this program is designed for 'protection and preservation of our country and its Entities and the protection and preservation of our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing'. Research requires a listening countenance towards organic totalities rather than their forensic dissection. Messages 'may occur as dreams' or in the quotidian warp and woof of everyday life. Research 'has less to do with capturing "truth" or drawing general conclusions, than

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the reconnecting of self, family, community and Entities that can be claimed and celebrated'.[61]

To decolonize higher education means that Aborigines become the authors rather than the object of research. The academy—or parts of it—becomes a vehicle for Indigenous recovery. Lester-Irabinna Rigney uses the term 'intellectual sovereignty', while Victor Hart refers to 'knowledge governance' and 'indigenous standpoint pedagogy'.[62] An explicitly philosophical defence of this position has been mounted by Aileen Moreton-Robinson. Against the utopian fantasies of Australian multiculturalism, she claims that Aborigines possess 'ontological belonging', a prior rootedness to the land that subsequent migrant-settlers cannot cancel. She rejects the postcolonial literature that, as she accurately observes, focuses on countries like India and Algeria which have cast out the settler and become sovereign. Aborigines are still asserting their sovereignty against the settler, after all, and they remain Indigenous despite any seeming hybridity and loss of tradition. 'Indigenous people may have been incorporated in and seduced by the cultural forms of the colonizer but this has not diminished the ontological relationship to land. Rather, it has produced a doubleness whereby Indigenous subjects can "perform" whiteness while being Indigenous.'[63]

This ontologically distinct Indigenousness consists in 'relationship to country, derived from the Dreaming', the 'original form of social living created by ancestral beings'. Like Martin–Booran Mirraboopa, Moreton-Robinson emphasizes the unity of creation, and asserts that Aborigines today believe that they reincarnate 'these ancestral beings', via which they 'derive their sense of belonging to country through and from them'. She dismisses the critique of essentialism by positing the radical incommensurability of the Indigenous self that, as part of creation, is immune to charges of essentialism. Western knowledge cannot comprehend it and should not try. 'Questioning the integrity and legitimacy of Indigenous ways of knowing and being has more to do with who has the power to be knower and whether their knowledge is commensurate with the West's "rational" belief system.' How seriously she takes this argument about the non-translatability of Indigenous knowledge and culture-boundedness of western rationality is unclear when she cites western thinkers and qualifies her statements about the Dreaming by writing that 'it is believed to have occurred'.[64] Such tensions seem inherent in any attempt to rationally base a claim of 'strategic essentialism' on ontologically-grounded Indigeneity.[65]

A way of avoiding this tension is to approach the question of Indigenous knowledges by attending to local practices. That is the approach of the Native American sociologist Eva Marie Garroutte, whose program of 'radical indigenism' has influenced the Australian Indigenous scholar Vicki Grieves.[66] This program is as reconstructive as it is declaratory, seeking the 'reassertion and rebuilding of traditional knowledge from its roots, its fundamental principles'. Indigenous philosophies are not named in detail because they are necessarily local in content, but they share 'vast cycles of giving and receiving, of covenant and celebration' that encompass not only the human world, but the totality of creation. These 'traditional ways of knowing', usually practical

knowledge indentured to 'original instruction' inherited from ancestors, are not intrinsically inscrutable to outsiders, however. Such philosophies are 'centered on the assumption that American Indian philosophies of knowledge are rational, articulable, coherent logics for ordering and knowing the world'. But for an outsider to participate in this knowledge creation, or even really understand it, she cannot remain in the ivory tower, lest it become sanitized. The program is radical precisely because the scholar must live the philosophies: 'it is not enough to think about them, one must trust them, and practice them' by embedding oneself 'in communities as contributing members'. Because this process is open-ended, keeping faith with Indigenous philosophies does not 'equate to ancient practices' and, in fact, kinship relations can be supplemented by ones of reciprocity that make for '*new* meanings about identity'.[67] If Indigenous peoples thereby make themselves room to develop their own traditions, the emphasis on relationships rather than corporeality means that radical Indigenism retains a humanistic residue that negotiates identity and difference in creative ways.

According to Grieves, such a program is essential not only for Indigenous knowledges, but also for how settler colonies relate to Indigenous peoples:

> Settler colonial societies such as Canada, the United States of America, Australia and New Zealand can only decolonize by the decolonizing of the mind, that is by developing new understandings and appreciations of Indigenous culture and society, new, respectful ways of relating to Indigenous Australians and the incorporation of their lifeways into the idea of the nation.[68]

Those lifeways she identifies in 'pattern thinking', what is often called 'Aboriginal spirituality', and is in fact 'the wholistic notions of the interconnectedness of the elements of the earth', animate and inanimate.[69] Like Garroutte, Grieves does not advocate privileged access to esoteric knowledge but attempts to ground Indigenous knowledges in research outcomes, making them accessible to all who wish to pursue the program.[70] Such knowledges are to be a gift to all rather than only a resource for Indigenous renewal.

Given the difficulty of defining Indigeneity in the international literature, some scholars have tried to distinguish it from the aspiration of peoples for autonomy and self-determination, goals that need not be grounded in Indigeneity *per se*.[71] Other researchers committed to an Indigenous research methodology implicitly accept this distinction by making less ambitious epistemological claims. Martin Nakata, for instance, sees an Indigenous standpoint not in privileged access to esoteric knowledge—as Martin–Booran Mirraboopa and Moreton-Robinson aver—but in a 'distinct form of analysis' that must be 'rational and reasoned' and not 'beyond the scrutiny of others'. Influenced by feminist theories about the 'cultural interface', such an analysis entails reflection on experience. The special Indigenous experience means that the Indigenous perspective lays bare that which is ignored by the powerful. In keeping with other Indigenous scholars, Nakata prescribes lived experience as the starting point for investigation rather than abstract concepts and

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categories, although in his hands experience is a conduit for insight rather than an end in itself.[72]

He is not alone. Lester-Irabinna Rigney agrees that Indigenism 'cannot afford hegemonic and simplistic generalisations and conclusions'. Indigenous intellectual sovereignty selectively adapts western critical theory's rejection of positivism by embedding it in, recovering and honouring Indigenous experience. 'The struggle for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty is to move our humanness, our scholarship, our identities and our knowledge systems from invisible to visible.'[73]

As might be expected, Indigenous scholars tend to deplore the federal government's intervention into the remote communities of the Northern Territory. Like many antiracist whites, they mock the proposition that these communities should join the 'real economy' as a tawdry consolation for unjust dispossession. Land rights, the symbol of sovereignty and Indigeneity, cannot be relinquished or compromised. The construction of these communities' problems as a national emergency or crisis displaces the deeper problem of illegitimate British conquest.[74] If intra-Aboriginal violence is regrettable, they continue, it is ultimately the fault of the colonialists who undermined traditional law. Aboriginal culture is not pathological and should not be blamed. 'Our living Aboriginal being is alive and awake causing a disruption to the colonial project', announced Irene Watson defiantly when confronted with depictions of communal disintegration. Such depictions are mischievous, these thinkers retort, because they merely confirm the worst racist stereotypes of whites and serve to distract attention away from government underfunding of Indigenous services. The government's rhetoric of Aboriginal 'responsibility' neglects the root causes of Indigenous disadvantage—colonial dispossession and trauma—and plays into the hands of racists who resent government assistance to remote communities. The intervention is above all an exercise in neocolonialism and neo-assimilation.[75]

This defensive perspective is indentured to a particular relationship to time. The traumatic past is the traumatic present. The colonialism that began in 1788 persists today. Indigenous people were victims then and they are now. Victor Hart's rejection of postcolonial studies is paradigmatic. The post-colonial gaze, he thinks, 'implies history no longer has an effect on the present and that history is only relevant for *understanding* the present, rather than in transforming it'.[76] The trauma was eloquently articulated by Kevin Gilbert in 1990:

> In attempting to present the evidence we are furiously attacked by white Australians and white converts, whatever their colour, as 'Going back two hundred years [...] the past is finished [...]!' Yet, cut off a man's leg, kill his mother, rape his land, psychologically attack him and keep him in a powerless position each day—does it not live on in the mind of the victim? Does it not continue to scar and affect his thinking? Deny it, but it still exists.[77]

The persistence of this traumatic consciousness is a function, at least in part, of the denial of original Indigenous sovereignty and the genocidal effects of British settlement.[78] But if Hart's contention that the past affects the present

is undeniable, Mbembe would ask whether freedom is thereby compromised. Does not Gilbert's self-reflexive consciousness demonstrate the capacity not to be determined by this past? By recognizing the temporal space between past and present—identifying the trauma as trauma means one has begun to overcome its spell—different questions can be asked of Aboriginal-settler encounters. They would include the question, popular among historians, about 'accommodation' between Aborigines and settlers, but also questions of the kind posed by Mbembe regarding the participation of some Aborigines in the extermination of others (like the Mounted Native Police in Queensland), and the origins of intra-black violence and exploitation.[79] Answering such questions would interrupt the heteronymous flow of historical relations, question the status of victimhood, enable a different comportment to historical responsibility and open up space for a different language of identity. These, at least, seem to be the hopes of a small number of Indigenous intellectuals, to whom I now turn.

History, responsibility, and peoplehood

We have seen why the transcendence of Aboriginal liberation narratives is difficult in Australia: holding fast to Indigeneity is the inevitable response of a tiny minority in the face of a settler majority intent on integrating Aborigines on its own terms. And yet, the much-discussed crisis of remote communities has led some Indigenous leaders to abandon the liberation narrative and to question the terms of conventional Aboriginal politics. They are, in the words of Mbembe, 'revisiting this archive of abjection, no longer in the context of the call to murder the settler, but at a time when brother and enemy have become one, and in an age in which the sovereign right to kill is exercised against one's own people first—the violence of brother towards brother'.[80]

Perhaps the most publicly prominent figure is Noel Pearson, an Indigenous leader who was at the forefront of the land rights debate as a lawyer in the 1980s and 1990s, and has since led the Cape York Institute in far north Queensland to advance the welfare of his people.[81] Equally significant is Marcia Langton, a pioneer of the university-based Aboriginal intelligentsia who has written extensively about Indigenous ontology, sovereignty and treaties, as well as about representations of Aborigines.[82] Both of them, in addition to political leaders like Warren Mundine, former national president of the Australian Labor Party, are trying to reshape the Indigenous political imaginary, and to that end have been given considerable space in Australia's public affairs journals and newspapers.

They support the intervention—indeed Pearson was apparently involved in its design—despite its origins with the former conservative coalition government of John Howard. In fact, their targets are its white—liberals and 'the old left'—and black opponents and the ideology of victimhood, entitlements and rights that unites them. These targets are, in the first place, white 'romantic defenders of Aboriginal self-determination' who 'need perpetual victims for [their] analysis to work'.[83] Although he acknowledges the support of white liberals for Indigenous rights over the decades, Pearson

goes so far as to suggest that they present a greater threat to Aborigines than racist conservatives. The construction of Aborigines as perpetual victims of colonialism robs them of agency and renders them dependent on white liberal beneficence, resulting in a destructive co-dependency in which the white conscience is soothed.[84] Consequently, the biggest danger for Indigenous people now, Langton thinks, 'is that the old-left thinking will again prevail'.[85]

Fellow Aborigines are not spared either. Langton is scathing about 'the "big men" in Aboriginal communities who harvest votes for their Labor mates', but also about women who oppose the intervention, because 'they undermine attempts to prevent rape of Aboriginal children and other crimes against our most vulnerable citizens'.[86] Both Pearson and Langton reject the argument that colonialism can be blamed entirely for the Indigenous predicament.

> Many of the strongest critics of the intervention have a sense of identity and dignity based on being in an oppressed 'racial' collective. As Aboriginal people, they feel they share the suffering of other Aboriginal people. I cannot quibble with this basic ontological characteristic of being a member of an oppressed group. The problem arises when there is a presumption of shared experience and willingness to overlook the moral, ethical or even rational view of particular behaviours. Solidarity for its own sake takes pre-eminence, and does not permit a clear-cut rejection of wrong doing.[87]

For the same reason, Pearson rejects the argument that structural disadvantages can account for Indigenous behaviour in these communities. The 'symptom theory' of destructive behaviour, which refers, say, alcoholism or sexual abuse to historical trauma or structural disadvantage, disempowers Aborigines by suggesting that they cannot take responsibility for their actions and therefore that nothing can be done. These problems, he argues, are the poisoned fruit of Indigenous traditions distorted by substance abuse, which is also perpetuated in the name of those traditions, such as reciprocity among kin-members.[88]

Aboriginal freedom to forge an autonomous destiny is his goal. Their history cannot ultimately condemn his people to perpetual victim status.

> The disorder in our community is the symptom in the sense that it is a product of our history and marginalisation. It is a different question to what extent our history *maintains* the social chaos [....]. Inherited trauma is an issue, as we have seen in the Jewish experience. But the same experience shows us that trauma is not in itself enough to debilitate a people.[89]

The regeneration of his people requires the ascription of personal responsibility. These remote communities (or postcolonies), he has pointed out on many occasions, have become anarchic 'outback hellholes' and cannot be spaces of regeneration until passive welfare is ended and social order is re-established.[90] Challenging the 'whiteness studies' paradigm, he is dismayed that so many Aborigines decry the virtues of thrift and education as 'white', implying that dissolute behaviour and dropping out of school are characteristically black.

Himself an accomplished university student and then lawyer, he does not share the suspicion of the academy: 'Indigenous children will be able to choose their own life path only after they have received the best education and have been protected from ill health and neglect.'[91] To that end, he also urges that remote communities integrate into the 'real economy' by developing partnerships with the private sector, a position directly at odds with the oppositional posture that regards such collaboration as craven capitulation to white settler colonialism, neo-liberalism and globalization.[92]

Langton, too, rejects the avoidance of Indigenous responsibility that ascribes contemporary intra-Aboriginal violence to colonialism. 'One of the sustained fantasies about traditional Aboriginal society', she notes, 'is that, until colonisation, life for Aboriginal people was peaceful and idyllic.'[93] She and Pearson extend the auto-critique of Kevin Gilbert who in 1978 punctured Aboriginal myths about Indigenous communal and kinship solidarity by writing that 'you only have to go to any Aboriginal mission or reserve to see the truth: the lack of community spirit, the neglect and abuse of tiny children, and all the rest of it'.[94]

This self-critical posture has led Pearson to question the metaphysics of Indigeneity proposed by Moreton-Robinson and others. Literate in the North American debates on race consciousness, he proposes 'peoplehood' as an alternative to 'nationhood' or, by implication, Indigeneity for Aboriginal peoples in Australia. Nationhood implies state sovereignty, which is not a realistic option for Aborigines in Australia, but peoplehood underlines the existing pan-Aboriginal sense of common identity and history. At the same time, it is a sufficiently open concept to admit of layered identities for Aborigines, an approach inspired by the philosopher Amartya Sen. Rather than the stark and rigid opposition of black and white and its 'illusion of singular identity', Pearson urges a complex amalgam of layers based on cultural and linguistic groups, religion, place of birth, residence, professional group and so forth. 'A pluralist and united world is one which has strong bonding identities between those who know each other, and bridging identities with strangers.'[95] Such a view would accord with Duncan Ivison's argument about the consistency of Aboriginal group rights and individual freedom.[96] Like Mbembe, then, Pearson proposes a philosophy with 'an ethics of the neighbour', with 'the possibility of a common world', and 'of a common humanity'.[97]

Independent of this program, Yin Paradies, a Melbourne-based research scientist who identifies himself as 'Aboriginal-Anglo-Asian Australian', has also mounted a trenchant critique of the Indigeneity case. Exploding 'fantasies of indigeneity', he points out that he himself is '[d]escended from both Indigenous and Euro-Australian ancestors', and is therefore 'both colonizer and colonized, both Black and consummately White'. The discourse of Indigeneity results in constructed boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, policed by whites and blacks alike, one demanding performances of race, the other questioning whether one is sufficiently black.[98] Such fantasies of alterity, in Paradies's view, ignore the fact that most Aborigines do not speak an Indigenous language, live on ancestral lands or identify with

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them. Neither can they underwrite an illegitimate assumption of Indigenous epistemological advantage and access to truth that he perceives in claims by some Aboriginal intellectuals. Like Kwame Anthony Appiah, Paradies thinks such protocols of belonging, though understandably fashioned to ensure cultural survival, 'end up replacing "one form of tyranny with another"'. They have become maladaptive and outdated.[99] And like Pearson, he wants to reconcile the persistence of Aboriginal peoplehood with a diversity of identities, and thereby relinquish romantic notions of singular Indigenous selfhood. Hybridity, defined in this way rather than as a synonym for deracination as Ian Anderson experienced as a teenager, ought to be permitted to describe Aborigines, as well.[100]

Conclusion

In many ways, these revisionist intellectuals are seeking to replace the language of authenticity with practices of sincerity that the African-American anthropologist John L Jackson has theorized in his book *Real Black: Adventures of Black Sincerity*.[101] An opponent of strategic essentialism as well as anti-essentialist constructivism, he proposes a critical ontology of racial being in which performances of blackness negotiate, though never harmonize, the tension between black particularity and universal human subjectivity. The freedom of sincerity inheres in cracking open closed racial objectifications, in replacing the language of unchanging racial substance with that of becoming, and in rejecting the racially-limited space of human meaningfulness prescribed by inherited regimes of power. The same point could be made about becoming white, of course, and one is reminded again of Mbembe when he writes that identity possesses no 'substance' but is constituted by '*practices of the self*', which is itself an application for Sartre's declaration that 'existence precedes essence'.[102]

Converging arguments are being made in other disciplines. The African-American political scientist Tommie Shelby, also inspired by Appiah, distinguishes between black solidarity and black identity—existence and essence, if you like—by arguing that struggle for justice against racism need not entail an emphatic sense of racial being. If African-Americans are disadvantaged because they are racialized as black, they can develop a 'pragmatic nationalist conception of political solidarity', in other words a political rather than racial identity committed 'to eliminating unjust racial inequality'. Like Pearson and Jackson, then, he is not a radical constructivist: he wants *black* political mobilization and he defends black group differentiation. But such mobilization and differentiation are hard to base philosophically on racial—rather than political—difference. Shelby's vision of black self-realization is 'forthrightly anti-essentialist', then, because it 'subordinate[s] questions of who blacks are as a people to questions about the ways in which they have been and continue to be unfairly treated'.[103]

An Australian rendition might separate Aboriginal solidarity and political mobilization from claims to Indigenous ontological difference. As we know, Mbembe—and implicitly Pearson—thinks that reclaiming freedom is only

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possible by challenging temporally-framed heteronymous formations. In this case, reflexivity about one's agency requires a new approach to both the self and group membership. Moving beyond a view of the self based on 'victimhood and mutilation' is as important as 'a revisiting of our own fables and the various grammars that, under the pretext of authenticity or radicalism, prosaically turn Africa into yet another deadly fiction'.[104] This critical task in Australia is being undertaken principally by a small number of insider intellectuals.

The temporal and thematic convergence of figures like Pearson, Langton, Paradies and Mbembe, as well as British and African-American scholars such as Paul Gilroy and Appiah, is significant.[105] They are registering and articulating the same impatience with the prevalent 'nativist' and racialized subjectivities expressed and represented, as they see it, by the majority of black intellectuals in Africa, Australia and the Atlantic world. This moment reflects the crisis of the African postcolony and the remote Indigenous communities. Indeed, for these figures, the various crises they are witnessing represent an 'event' that shatters received categories of analysis, because the customary intellectual categories no longer provide orientation in fulfilling the political promises of ideological movements. The exhaustion of concepts stimulates learning processes that issue, ultimately, in their negation and sublation. It has led them to try to develop positions that transcend the either-or logic of colonialism and anti-colonialism.

Whether this attempt is politically responsible is a question that Indigenous critics of Pearson, Langton and Paradies are posing. Following Gayatri Spivak, they seem committed to a 'strategic essentialism' which insists that, since some essentializing is unavoidable, it should be consciously deployed in their collective interests.[106] But a political strategy is not necessarily a sound theory, Pearson *et al* may respond, a point that Spivak makes herself.[107] The questions, then, are: what is the interest of Indigenous people? How are such interests, and indeed Indigenous people, defined? And who answers these questions?

Acknowledgements

Notes

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4 Vicki Grieves, 'Indigenous Australians: Well-Served by Current Public Policy? Some Reflections on the Indigenous History Wars', in David Callaan (ed), *Australia: Who Cares?*, Perth: Network Books, 2007, pp 25–40; Luke Caldwell, 'The Changing Winds of Civilization: The Aboriginal and Sovereignty Between the Desert and the State', *Intersections*, 10(2), 2009, pp 115–144. Former Indigenous member of parliament in the Northern Territory, John Ah Kit, linked the federal intervention to genocide: see 'Indigenous Intervention "Genocide"', *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 August 2007. An important essay critiquing the cultural pathology thesis is Norman Sheehan, '"Some Call it Culture": Aboriginal Identity and the Imaginary Moral Centre', *Social Alternatives*, 20(20), 2001, pp 29–33. Thanks to Vicki Grieves for this reference.

5 Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Imagining the Good Indigenous Citizen: Race War and the Pathology of Patriarchal White Sovereignty', *Cultural Studies Review*, 15(2), 2009, pp 61–80, p 70.

6 Noel Pearson, 'Passive Welfare and the Destruction of Indigenous Society in Australia', in Peter Saunders (ed), *Reforming the Australian Welfare State*, Melbourne: Institute of Family Studies, 2000, pp 136–155; Pearson, 'Vale Hope in Outback Hellhole', *The Australian*, 17 February 2007, reprinted in Pearson, *Up from the Mission: Selected Writing*, Melbourne: Black Inc., 2009, pp 139–142; Marcia Langton, 'Stop the Abuse of Children', *The Australian*, 12 December 2007.

7 Megan Davis and Sarah Maddison, 'The Gains Must Not Be Squandered', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April 2008. On Langton's comments, see Paul Connolly, 'A Woman Intent on Making a Difference', *The Sun-Herald*, Extra Supplement, 10 May 2009, p 6. More critique of Langton and Pearson in Maddison, *Black Politics: Inside the Complexity of Aboriginal Political Culture*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2009.

8 I use this term, a synonym for 'Indigenousness', because it is used so often by participants in these discussions. See, for example, its liberal use in the special issue on 'Critical Indigenous Theory' in the journal *Cultural Studies Review*, 15(2), 2009. Unfortunately, this volume appeared too late for me to respond to each of its essays. Note the reservations about the term in Vicki Grieves, 'The "Battlefields": Identity, Authenticity and Aboriginal Knowledges in Australia', in Henry Mind (ed), *Indigenous Peoples: Self-Determination, Knowledge, Indigeneity*, Delft: Eburon, 2008, pp 287–311.

9 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

10 Maurice Taonezvi Vambe and Abebe Zegeye, 'Notes on Theorizing Black Diaspora from Africa', *African Identities*, 5(1), 2007, pp 5–32.

11 E.g. Annie E Coombs, *Rethinking Settler Colonialism: History and Memory in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005; Duncan Ivison, Paul Patton and Will Sanders (eds), *Political Theory and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

12 Patrick Thornberry, *Minorities and Human Rights Law*, London: Minority Rights Group, 1991, p 10. Lorenzo Veracini, 'Settler Colonialism and Decolonisation', *borderlands e-journal*, 6(2), 2007: http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol6no2_2007/veracini_settler.htm (viewed 15 May 2008).

13 How far has Edward Said's call for critical self-reflection, for instance, been heard? Arabs 'and Palestinians in particular', he wrote, 'must also begin to explore our own histories, myths, and patriarchal ideas of the nation . . . [a task that] cannot either be left unanswered or postponed indefinitely under the guise of national defense and national unity': Said, 'New History, Old Ideas', *Al-Ahram Weekly On-line*, 21–27 May 1998: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1998/378/pal2.htm (accessed 8 February 2005).

14 Gillian Cowlishaw, 'Cultures of Complaint: An Ethnography of Rural Racial Rivalry', *Journal of Sociology*, 42(4), 2006, pp 429–445, p 431. See also Barry Morris, 'A Crisis in Identity: Aborigines, Media, the Law and Politics—Civil Disturbance in an Australian Town', *Critique of Anthropology*, 25(1), 2005, pp 59–85.

15 Thanks to Gillian Cowlishaw for sharing her ethnographic experiences from her book project on Indigenous Australians in western Sydney, which has been published as *The City's Outback*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009. See also Tess Lea, *Bureaucrats and Bleeding Hearts: Indigenous Health in Northern Australia*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008; and Tess Lea, Gillian Cowlishaw and Emma Esther Kowal

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16 For a study that combines reflections on memory and reconciliation with ethnographic immersion, see Deborah Bird Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004.

17 Achille Mbembe, 'Provisional Notes on the Postcolony', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 62(1), 1992, pp 3–37; Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*. It has been much discussed in African Studies: Jeremy Weate, 'Postcolonial Theory on the Brink: A Critique of Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony*', *African Identities*, 1(1), 2003, pp 1–18; Bayo Williams, 'The Postcolony as Trope: Searching for a Lost Continent in a Borderless World', *Research in African Literatures*, 31(2), 2000, pp 179–193; Henry Paget, 'African Political Philosophy and the Crisis of the Postcolony', *Socialism and Democracy*, 21(3), 2007, pp 36–59. Mbembe's Chicago-based South African colleagues Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff have applied the postcolony concept in their own way: Comaroff and Comaroff (eds), *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

18 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p 102. Emphasis added.

19 Achille Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony*: A Brief Response to Critics', *African Identities*, 4(2), 2006, pp 143–178, p 153.

20 His 1992 article declared. 'the old binaries of 'resistance v. passivity, autonomy v. subjection, state v. civil society, hegemony v. counter-hegemony, totalisation v. detotalisation' hindered thinking: Mbembe, 'Provisional Notes on the Postcolony', p 3.

21 Mbembe, 'Provisional Notes on the Postcolony', pp 11–14, 17. Emphases in original. In his reply to critics, Mbembe describes his aim thus: 'The politics of life, that is to say, the conditions of possibility for the African subject to exercise his or her own sovereignty, and to find in this relationship with oneself the fullness of his or her happiness—such was thus the heart of my inquiry.' Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony*: A Brief Response to Critics', p 156.

22 Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony*: A Brief Response to Critics', p 157.

23 Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony*: A Brief Response to Critics', pp 168, 163.

24 Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony*: A Brief Response to Critics', pp 149–150.

25 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, conclusion.

26 Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony*: A Brief Response to Critics', p 156.

27 Achille Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', *Public Culture*, 14(1), 2002, pp 239–273.

28 Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p 245.

29 Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', pp 257–258.

30 Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p 263.

31 Mbembe's texts are riddled with vitalist, Nietzschean references to the meaning of history for 'life', and he begins 'African Modes of Self-Writing' with an epigraph from Gilles Deleuze, 'The only subjectivity is time . . .'.

32 Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p 243.

33 Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p 271.

34 I am grateful to Paul Patton for discussions on Bergson, Deleuze and Mbembe.

35 Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony*: A Brief Response to Critics', p 154.

36 Achille Mbembe in conversation with Christian Hoellfer, *Chimurenga*, December 2002: www.chimurenga.co.za/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=40 (viewed 10 January 2008).

37 Achille Mbembe, 'Passages to Freedom: The Politics of Racial Reconciliation in South Africa', *Public Culture*, 20(1), 2008, pp 5–18, p 7.

38 Patrick Wolfe, 'Structure and Event: Settler Colonialism, Time, and the Question of Genocide', in A Dirk Moses (ed), *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008, pp 102–132.

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45 Irene Watson, 'Legitimising White Supremacy', *Online Opinion*, 28 August 2007: www.onlineopinion. com.au/view.asp?article=6277 (viewed 13 April 2008). This is an extract from 'Settled and Unsettled Spaces: Are We Free to Roam?', in Aileen Moreton-Robinson (ed), *Sovereign Subjects*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007, pp 15–32.

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Australian Studies, 76, 2003, pp 203–214. See most recently her *Please Knock Before You Enter: Aboriginal Regulation of Outsiders and the Implications for Researchers*, Brisbane: Post Pressed, 2008.

[62] Lester-Irabinna Rigney, 'A First Perspective of Indigenous Australian Participation in Science: Framing Indigenous Research Towards Indigenous Australian Intellectual Sovereignty', *Kaurna Higher Education Journal*, 7, 2001, pp 1–13. He borrows the term from Osage First Nations scholar Robert Warrior. Victor Hart, 'Mapping Aboriginality', in Helen Armstrong (ed), *Investigating Queensland's Cultural Landscapes. Report 1: Setting the Theoretical Scene*, Cultural Landscape Research Unit, Queensland University of Technology, 2001, pp 49–64, pp 49–50.

[63] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, '"I Still Call Australia Home": Indigenous Belonging and Place in a White Postcolonizing Society', in Sara Ahmed, Claudia Cantaneda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller (eds), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003, pp 23–40, p 31; Irene Watson, 'Aboriginal Law and the Sovereignty of *Terra Nullius*', *borderlands e-journal*, 1(2), 2002; Anderson, 'I, the "Hybrid" Aborigine'.

[64] Moreton-Robinson, '"I Still Call Australia Home"', pp 31–32; Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Towards a New Research Agenda? Foucault, Whiteness and Indigenous Sovereignty', *Journal of Sociology*, 42(4), 2006, pp 383–395. Somewhat inconsistently, she also rejects what she calls the 'racialized binary' of the white female researcher and Indigenous women: Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Tiddas Talkin' Up to the White Woman: When Huggins et al. Took on Bell', in Grossman, *Blacklines*, pp 66–80, p 76. Michael Dodson shares her belief about the untranslatability of Indigenous knowledge and consciousness. See his 'The End in the Beginning', p 39.

[65] Mbembe opposed this line of reasoning as philosophically shallow. One might also raise the issue of performative contradiction that cannot be wished away by claims that advancing and defending arguments is merely 'performing whiteness'. See Martin Jay, 'The Debate Over the Performative Contradiction: Habermas versus the Poststructuralists', in Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe and Albrecht Wellmer (eds), *Philosophical Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992, pp 261–279.

[66] Eva Marie Garroutte, *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.

[67] Garroutte, *Real Indians*, pp 101, 107–108, 113, 127, 132, 137–139.

[68] Vicki Grieves, 'Aboriginal Spirituality: A Baseline for Indigenous Knowledges Development in Australia', *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 28(2), 2008, pp 361–396, p 384; Grieves, 'The "Battlefields"'; see also Grieves, 'Approaching Aboriginal Histories: Family, Identity and Wellbeing in Aboriginal Australia', PhD diss., Macquarie University, 2009.

[69] Grieves, 'Aboriginal Spirituality', p 362.

[70] Personal communication, 19 October 2009.

[71] John Bowen, 'Should We Have a Universal Concept of "Indigenous Peoples' Rights"? Ethnicity and Essentialism in the Twenty-First Century', *Anthropology Today*, 16(4), 2000, pp 12–16; Ian McIntosh, 'Defining Oneself, and Being Defined as, Indigenous: A Comment', *Anthropology Today*, 18(3), 2002, pp 23–24. See also the multi-author discussions in 'The Concept of Indigeneity', *Social Anthropology*, 14(1), 2006, pp 17–32, and 'Indigeneity: Global and Local', *Current Anthropology*, 50(3), 2009, pp 303–333.

[72] Martin Nakata, *Disciplining Savages, Savaging the Disciplines*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004, p 214. He has always rejected 'intellectual separatism': Nakata, 'Anthropological Texts and Indigenous Standpoints'. Note Vicki Grieves's extensive critique of this book for, among other things, avoiding the content of Indigenous intellectual traditions: 'What are missing are the cultural values as derived from Indigenous philosophy'. See her review in *Cultural Studies Review*, 15(2), pp 199–203, p 202.

[73] Rigney, 'A First Perspective of Indigenous Australian Participation in Science', pp 1–13.

[74] Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Fiona Nicoll, 'We Shall Fight Them on the Beaches: Protesting Cultures of White Possession', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 89, 2006, pp 149–186, p 160. Tracey Bunda rebuked Noel Pearson at the Adelaide Festival of Ideas on 8 July 2007 for counter-posing land rights and social order in certain circumstances. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'The House that Jack Built: Britishness and White Possession', *Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association Journal*, 1, 2005, pp 21–29.

[75] Irene Watson, 'Response to Peter Sutton', *Macquarie Law Journal*, 6, 2006, pp 184–185, p 184; Larissa Behrendt and Nicole Watson, 'Good Intentions Are Not Good Enough', *Australian Literary Review*, 2 May 2007; Larissa Behrendt, Address to the Indigenous Labor Network, 13 July 2005: www.jumbunna.uts.edu.au/research/alpiln_13_07_05.pdf (viewed 18 April 2008). Rebecca Stringer,

'A Nightmare of the Neocolonial Kind: Politics of Suffering in Howard's Northern Territory Intervention', *borderlands e-journal*, 6(2), 2007. See also www.womenforwik.org

76 Hart, 'Teaching Black and Teaching Back', pp 14–15: 'Postcolonial studies are becoming a celebratory cover-up of a dangerous period in Aboriginal peoples' lives and especially a cover-up on the "hows" and "whys" relating to the genocide of Aboriginal people past and present.'

77 Kevin Gilbert, quoted in Philip Morrissey, 'Dancing with Shadows: Erasing Aboriginal Self and Sovereignty', in Aileen Moreton-Robinson (ed), *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous Sovereignty Matters*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2007, pp 65–74, p 73.

78 On genocide in Australia, see A Dirk Moses, 'Moving the Genocide Debate Beyond the History Wars', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 54(2), 2008, pp 248–270.

79 Jonathan Richards, *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police*, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2008; Margaret Fels, *Good Men and True. The Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District, 1837–1853*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988.

80 Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony*: A Brief Response to Critics', p 153. The quotation would need to be amended from killing one's brother to abusing one's sister.

81 Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership: www.cyi.org.au. Pearson's commitment to the rights agenda and frustration with conservative government ministers led him once to call them 'racist scum'.

82 Marcia Langton, 'An Aboriginal Ontology of Being and Place: The Performance of Aboriginal Property Relations in the Princess Charlotte Bay Area of Eastern Cape York Peninsula, Australia', PhD diss., Macquarie University, 2005; Langton, 'Dominion and Dishonour: A Treaty Between Our Nations?' *Postcolonial Studies*, 4(1), 2001, pp 13–26.

83 Marcia Langton, 'Real Change for Real People', *The Australian*, 26 January 2008. Mundine likewise opposes 'this romantic bullshit about Aboriginal culture', quoted in Stuart Rintoul, 'Chance to Cut PC Rubbish: Mundine', *The Australian*, 4 February 2008.

84 Noel Pearson, 'White Guilt, Victimhood, and the Quest for the Radical Centre', *Griffith Review*, 16, 2007, reprinted in Pearson, *Up from the Mission*, pp 219–262.

85 Marcia Langton, 'Trapped in the Aboriginal Reality Show', *Griffith Review*, 19, 2008, pp 143–162, p 151.

86 Langton, 'Trapped in the Aboriginal Reality Show', pp 147, 151.

87 Langton, 'Trapped in the Aboriginal Reality Show', p 153.

88 Noel Pearson, 'Light on the Hill', Ben Chifley Memorial Lecture, 2000, in Pearson, *Up from the Mission*, pp 181–195; Pearson, 'Land Rights and Progressive Wrongs', *Griffith Review*, 2, 2003, reprinted in Pearson, *Up from the Mission*, pp 210–218; Pearson, 'Reciprocity Resurrected', *The Australian*, 12 May 2007.

89 Noel Pearson, 'Underlying Principles of a New People for the Restoration of Indigenous Social Order', 23 July 2003: www.capeyorkpartnerships.com/team/noelpearson/pdf/np-restore-social-order-23-7-03.pdf (viewed 8 April 2008).

90 Noel Pearson, *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, Cape York, 2000, reprinted in Pearson, *Up from the Mission*, pp 143–171; Pearson, 'Vale Hope in Outback Hellhole'.

91 Noel Pearson, 'Choice is Not Enough', *The Australian*, 28 April 2007.

92 Noel Pearson, 'Peace and Prosperity for Indigenous Australians', *Online Opinion*, 28 October 2005: www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=42 (viewed 8 April 2008).

93 Langton, 'Trapped in the Aboriginal Reality Show', p 9.

94 Kevin Gilbert, *Living Black: Blacks Talk to Kevin Gilbert*, London and Melbourne: Allen Lane, 1978, p 1.

95 Pearson, 'White Guilt, Victimhood, and the Quest for the Radical Centre', pp 245–246.

96 Duncan Ivison, 'The Logic of Aboriginal Rights', *Ethnicities*, 3(3), 2003, pp 321–344.

97 Pearson, 'White Guilt, Victimhood, and the Quest for the Radical Centre', pp 245–246.

98 Yin Paradies, 'Beyond Black and White: Essentialism, Hybridity and Indigeneity', *Journal of Sociology*, 42(4), 2006, pp 355–367, p 357. This point is also made by Terry Moore, 'Problematising Identity: Governance, Politics and the "Making of the Aborigines"', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 80, 2005, pp 177–188.

99 Paradies, 'Beyond Black and White', p 361. He quotes Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction', in Amy Gutmann (ed), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, p 163. See also Paradies, 'Anti-Racism and Indigenous Australians', *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 5(1), 2005, pp 1–28.

100 On this point, see also Arlif Dirlik, 'Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation', *Interventions*, 4(3), 2002, pp 428–448.

101 John L Jackson, *Real Black: Adventures of Black Sincerity*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.
102 Mbembe, 'African Modes of Self-Writing', p 272. Emphasis in original.
103 Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005, pp 3–4.
104 Mbembe, '*On the Postcolony:* A Brief Response to Critics', pp 181–182.
105 Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000; Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, New York: W W Norton, 2006, and *The Ethics of Identity*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005. See also Bill Ashcroft, *Post-Colonial Transformation*, London: Routledge, 2001.
106 See the criticisms of Irene Watson, 'In the Northern Territory Intervention What Is Saved or Rescued and at What Cost?', and Moreton-Robinson, 'Imagining the Good Indigenous Citizen', *Cultural Studies Review*, 15(2), 2009, pp 45–60 and pp 61–80.
107 '[I]t is not possible, within discourse, to escape essentializing somewhere. The moment of essentialism or essentialization is irreducible. In deconstructive ethical practice, you have to be aware that you are going to essentialize anyway. So then strategically you can look at essentialism, not as descriptions of the way things are, but as something one must adapt to produce a critique of anything.' See 'Gayatri Spivak', in Russell Ferguson *et al* (eds), *Discourses: Conversations in Postmodern Art and Culture*, New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art/MIT Press, 1990, p 106; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, New York: Routledge, 1993, p 4.