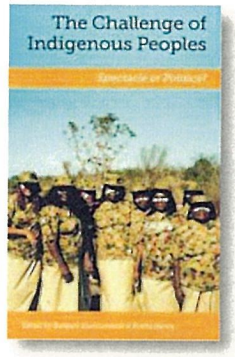

The Challenge of Indigenous Peoples

Review of *The Challenge of Indigenous Peoples*
by Theresa Petray

In an interview I conducted during my PhD research, an Aboriginal activist told me that a time was coming when Aboriginal Australians would need to 'join hands' with Indigenous peoples from around the world and 'march onetime' for equality, peace, and freedom. His assertion was a hypothetical one, as he explained that nothing was actively happening about this, but that eventually, it will happen. *The Challenge of Indigenous Peoples: Spectacle or Politics?*, edited by Barbara Glowczewski and Rosita Henry, points out that hands have already been joined and although the links are not always literal, Indigenous cultural performances work to construct 'an alternative network of alliances across the planet' (6). That is, the groups and performances discussed in this book link people together in ways that may not always be obvious, but are nonetheless meaningful. These networks take the form of artist cooperatives, joint exhibitions, international performances, but also more abstract forms such as shared affinities, common histories of injustice, and dances that move around the globe like coconuts brought to the shore by ocean currents (as described by Joe Neparrnga Gumbula in Glowzcewski & Henry, 171).

This edited volume brings together the works of established researchers and early career researchers. As an early career researcher myself, the depth of knowledge that comes with decades of work in a particular field seems like a holy grail which enables a more intimate level of knowledge than could be achieved in the space of a PhD candidature. But as the contributions from the early career researchers in this volume demonstrate, a PhD affords an intensely concentrated field experience that is not diminished by its brevity. As this volume indicates, it is possible for both beginners and long-time anthropologists to have the the ability to tell ethnographic stories in depth and with eloquence.

A common feature of all the chapters in this book is the presentation of Indigenous peoples as groups and individuals with agency. The book looks at how Indigenous peoples use ritual, artistic, and political performances to engage with powerholders, particularly the state. Through a series of local stories, this volume attempts to "weave a complex social fabric" (3) which ultimately displays the "networks of connection" (245) in which Indigenous peoples are embedded. As Glowzcewski (10) suggests in her introduction, "all these local, national or international meetings are political platforms where life is reinvented and resistance takes root in

creative mobilisation". This introduction sets the stage for the ensuing chapters, which range from ethnographic accounts of Aboriginal Australians (Part One) to chapters on Pacific Islanders, the Adivasi of India, and the Khanty of Siberia (Part Two).

In a theoretical discussion of nomadism, Stéphane Lacam-Gitareu presents an interesting discussion of the outstation movement, describing the more recent move away from towns since around 2000 as a way to avoid the problems that come with towns – like a seachange away from alcohol and violence. Comparing the network of pan-Aboriginality in Australia to linguistic chains, Lacam-Gitareu suggest that pan-Aboriginality may be more virtual than real. Jessica De Largy Healy also discusses the virtuality of networks in a more literal sense, highlighting the ways that digital communications technologies reflect, accompany, and enhance the "network thinking" that she experienced in her fieldwork in Arnhem Land. These technologies make visible the extensive connections between people, places, and times, and allow for objects to once again come alive to Yolngu. In addition to revitalising the networks, the technologies provide the Yolngu with the tools of agency, to act as "their own historians" (64).

The links between Yolngu and Yolngu, between Yolngu and outsiders, and between past and present, are echoed throughout the book. Anke Tonnaer describes a 2001 performance of the "Aeroplane dance" in Borroloola as a means for the largely female performers to engage with the Australian culture of masculinity, and allows men and women in the community to engage with and challenge their own internal gender dynamics. Martin Préaud describes two theatrical performances in different parts of Australia, both of which reinvigorate the links between Aboriginal Australians and outsiders, and between past and present. The performances importantly inform outsiders of these links, partially through the stories told but also through the process of developing the performances in collaboration with Andrish Saint-Clare, an outsider. These performances may also be an invitation, sent out to the largely non-Indigenous audience, for further networks to be established.

Shifting to art, Arnaud Morvan depicts the opportunities that art, and its associated events, provide Aboriginal people to create and nourish international networks. Art allows people to present themselves and to maintain cultural uniqueness despite globalising forces. Art is "an action" (106) that also provides a stage for more explicit activism. In addition to communicating via their works, Aboriginal people use the explanations of their work for political purposes, and place spectators in "the position of apprentice" (116). Géraldine Le Roux looks at art from a different perspective, critiquing the ongoing challenges of 'inauthenticity' levelled at city-dwelling Aboriginal people. Using art as an act of agency, these urbanites "rewrote colonial history, reclaimed language and the stereotypes created and imposed by the colonial power" (129).

The final chapter in Part One, written by Wayne Jowandi Barker, is an abrupt but welcome change of pace. Barker writes of his own experiences as an Aboriginal

performer, both within Australia and overseas, travelling through Europe. This chapter is engaging but still critical and on-theme: Barker suggests, for example, that festivals and films provide "the stage for our present day struggles" (141) and that "our culture is never static, that it lives and breathes in the descendants of the original inhabitants of this continent" (145). I found myself writing down quote after quote from Barker's insightful chapter which discusses the way that festivals and other art works communicate the survival of culture within Aboriginal society, as well as to outsiders – but as with all art, there is no way to control the way that art is consumed, which is something that Barker seems at times uneasy with.

Moving off shore, Part Two heads first to the Pacific and then further afield. Glowzcewski and Henry write about the Festival of Pacific Arts held in Palau in 2004, an event which was an "affirmation of a network of local cultures" (160). The Festival provided a stage for small Pacific states, typically considered insignificant on a global political stage, to strengthen ties with one another to collectively resist larger states. While addressing these international political motives, the authors illustrate the ways that outsiders were woven into Palauan society, through the pairing of visitors with local organisation. This duality was a reflection of pairing that is important in other aspects of Palauan culture, such as architecture, government, dancing, and cosmology.

Another Festival of Pacific Arts, the first, held in 1972, is described by Wolfgang Kempf. This chapter focuses in on the Banabans, relocated from Kiribati to Fiji following the decimation of their island through phosphate mining. Unlike many of the other ethnographic examples in this volume, the Banabans are not interested in linking their present to their past; rather, they used the festival to "dramatically orchestrate difference by modern means" (182). The Melanesian Arts and Culture Festival, explored by Jari Kupiainen, is a more local event, focused on representing local culture to other locals and providing a stage for Melanesians to communicate with one another. However, this chapter illustrates the difficulties and politics which often take place behind the scenes of festivals, such as internal schism over representation on committees.

In India, involvement in formal international networks allows the Adivasi to communicate with the Indian state. As Alexandre Soucaille argues, though, the informal connections are equally important, such as the comparison between Adivasi revolutionary Birsa Mundi with international revolutionary icon Che Guevara. In this post-colonial setting, the Adivasi are attempting to present themselves, in opposition to the presentations imposed on them by others. Likewise, in Siberia the Khanty use rituals like the Bear Games to continually (re) construct themselves, and to challenge colonisation (Dominique Samson Normand de Chambourg).

The final chapter, by Rosita Henry, returns to the importance of agency. Indigeneity, it is made clear in this conclusion, is "a relationship always in the process of *becoming*" (247). That is, indigeneity is a practice and a performance, albeit limited by political and social structures. In an

answer to the question posed in the title, Henry argues that the challenge of Indigenous peoples is between spectacle and politics.

The "complex social fabric" (3) presented in this volume is woven into a coherent and beautiful tapestry in the Introduction and Conclusion. Glowczewski and Henry tie together a complex table of contents, uniting the seemingly disparate chapters discussing Aboriginal Australians, Melanesians, Micronesians, Polynesians, Adivasi, and Khanty. They make sense of stories focused on topics ranging from computer technology to dance to ritual to contemporary art. A translation from the original French, this volume is easy to read but firmly based in anthropological theory and ethnographic understanding.

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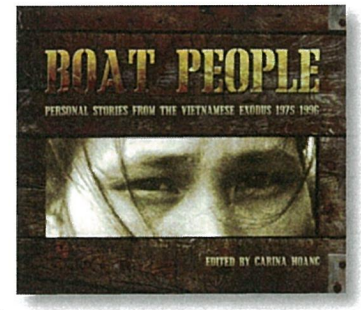

Boat People: Personal Stories from the Vietnamese Exodus 1975-1996

Review of *Boat People: Personal Stories from the Vietnamese Exodus 1975-1996*
by Leili Golafshani

Why flee?

The book includes forty stories told by the officials of refugee camps and Vietnamese refugees who have mostly settled in Australia with some in U.S.A.. The elegantly designed book is foreworded and endorsed by ex-Prime Minister of Australia Malcolm Fraser (1975-1983). Often each story begins with an old personal photo of the writer as a child or in refugee camp or photo of the boat or an illustration related to the theme of the story. The story usually ends with a recent mostly happy face of the writer in the new home country, sometimes accompanied with a photo of family members. In between, the actual story doesn't exceed three pages, frequently annexed with a copy of a document or confidential letter in an envelope.

Within a couple of pages the refugee explain the reason for their flight from Southern Vietnam; the ordeals and