Australian Anthropology in Its Colonial Context

Dario Di Rosa

The Colonial Background

The Australian continent and the island of New Guinea played a major role in the development of the discipline of anthropology and ethnographic practice well before their professionalization.[1] It was after the British Crown had a solid footing on the coastal areas of Australia that the

[1] When the term 'New Guinea' is used in this essay without any further qualifier, I refer to the territories of the contemporary nation-state of Papua New Guinea and the Indonesian province of West Papua. Given the complex history of colonial domination of New Guinea, in this chapter I use the historically appropriate names when referring to the various colonial territories.

D. Di Rosa (✉)
The University of South Pacific, Suva, Fiji
e-mail: dario.dirosa@usp.ac.fj

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549

exploration of the interior of the continent began, producing a wealth of ethnographic material through the encounter with Aboriginal communities. In 1788, the British Crown established a penal colony in what is now New South Wales and from here the British influence on the continent slowly but steadily expanded along the coastlines. Only after a solid footing on the coastal areas had been established, and the continent had officially been claimed as a British colony in 1827, did a systematic exploration of the continent's interior begin. Highly influential works emerged during this period, for example Fison and Howitt's (1880) study of kinship systems—inspired by Morgan's (1871) work in North America—and Spencer and Gillen's (1899) monograph on Aboriginal societies in Central Australia, which provided much ethnographic material for Durkheim's (1912) influential study on totemism. These examples show two instances of the characteristic give and take relationship between the theoretical advancement of the discipline and this region of the world. At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, British academic anthropology saw a progressive shift from the so-called armchair anthropology to the first-hand collection of ethnographic 'data'. Symbolic of this shift is the 1898 *Cambridge Anthropological Expedition* to the Torres Strait (between Australia and New Guinea), an expedition that saw the participation of leading scholars such as Haddon, Rivers and Seligman, whose results were published in six volumes (*Reports of the Cambridge Expedition*: 1901–1908). It was during this expedition that Rivers (1910) elaborated the 'genealogical method', which is still a cornerstone of the collection in the field of kinship terminology. Nearly a decade later in the Solomon Islands, Rivers and Hocart conducted their fieldwork on matrilineal kinship which was pioneering for their relatively long stay (six months) and its multi-situated nature that allowed the two ethnographers to grasp the importance of inter-pelagic relations among different social groups (see Hviding & Berg, 2014). These few examples demonstrate that the South Western Pacific region had a key place in the development of ethnographic practice well before its canonization by Malinowski (1922).

It was from this British imperial milieu that Australian anthropology emerged, thanks to the role played by Hubert Murray, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Territory of Papua from 1908 to 1940. He promoted a policy for administering the 'natives', which, albeit paternalistic, aimed at enabling the coexistence of the colonisers and the colonised, whilst protecting and maintaining the cultural differences that were deemed acceptable to the sensibility and the political goals of the colonisers. While this

policy was in line with the changing international perception of colonial practices, provoked by a marked liberal turn at the end of the nineteenth century (Stoler & Cooper, 1997, pp. 29–33), the specific historical experience of Australian colonialism had an undeniable weight. After much pressure from its Australian colonies, especially Queensland, the British Crown declared the south-eastern portion of New Guinea a British Protectorate in 1884. In 1901, the British colonies on the Australian continent federated into the Commonwealth of Australia, becoming the Crown's dominion, and in 1906 the administration of the south-eastern portion of New Guinea officially passed from British to Australian hands, becoming the Territory of Papua. Looking back at its recent colonial past stained in blood, among the emerging Australian middle class formed the opinion that the Territory of Papua should not become the same kind of frontier that for decades constituted the setting for violent clashes between Aborigines and colonisers (see Di Rosa, 2017). The nineteenth century image of the "doomed race" that characterised discourses on Australian Aborigines slightly morphed into a similar discourse at the turn of the century, tainted by psychological tones, attributing the causes of the depopulation in Melanesia to a loss of a will to live due to the rapid cultural change colonialism entailed for the local population (Rivers, 1922). If the demise of the Aboriginal population in Australia, though lamentable, meant *de facto* an easier access to land where colonists could settle, the depopulation of the south Pacific meant a serious threat to the labour supply in habitats that the science of the time deemed dangerous for the health of "whites" (Anderson, 2006). These were some of the moral and practical preoccupations the Lieutenant-Governor Murray had in mind when promoting his 'native policies', hence he turned to the young discipline of anthropology to address them.

Murray deemed it his administration's duty to find meaningful substitutes to those local cultural complexes and practices considered unacceptable under colonial rule, which nonetheless provided meaning to the lives of the colonised; first and foremost, any kind of homicide linked to important social functions like ceremonies or sorcery accusations were substituted with alternative practices which were acceptable to the colonisers (Chinnery, 1919). Although Murray believed in the usefulness of anthropology as a scientific tool for the colonial administration, his relations with young ethnographers conducting fieldwork in the Territory were less than idyllic. Malinowski's notorious diary registers a marked shift in his perception of the Lieutenant-Governor during the time between his first

fieldwork at Mailu and his subsequent one in the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski, 1989, pp. 74–75; pp. 109–110). Reo Fortune also had frictions with Murray when the anthropologist refused to provide information about his informants' sorcery practices which were the subject of his research at Dobu (Gray, 1999). Sorcery, in fact, was one of those "traditional" practices the colonial administration outlawed for its dangerous anti-social effects. The administration of justice in relation to local customs became the battleground for a lively debate between the anthropologist Pitt-Rivers and Murray on the pages of the journal *Man* (Pitt-Rivers, 1929, 1930; Murray, 1930, 1931). There is little doubt that Murray saw in the discipline of anthropology a *practical* instrument and had little patience for theoretical discussions; this was especially true for positions of British Functionalism championed by Malinowski, which, on theoretical grounds, deemed any intervention on local social institutions as doomed to fail and actually harmful to the social mechanisms keeping a society together. It comes as no surprise that Murray lobbied for a position of Government Anthropologist as part of the administrative apparatus: someone with his feet on the ground rather than in the corridors of academic institutions.

The imperial milieu as well as family ties connected Murray to British academia.[2] Prominent figures of the early generation of ethnographers, such as Haddon and Marrett, supported Murray's project to establish the position of Government Anthropologist and suggested potential candidates for such a position to him. It was only in 1921 that, after some hesitation, F. E. Williams was appointed Government Anthropologist, a position he would keep until his death in combat in 1943. From his enviable position, Williams produced a wealth of detailed monographs published by the *Oxford University Press*, often prefaced by scholars of the calibre of Haddon, Marrett, and Seligman. Moreover, Williams could criticise the evermore-influential functionalist paradigm from his direct experience of the impact of colonialism and socio-cultural change on local societies (Williams, 1976). Despite the fact that Murray found in Williams a strong ally for his view of anthropology as a practical tool of colonial administration, evidence shows that the Lieutenant-Governor was seldom open to the practical suggestions of his Government Anthropologist when it came to increasing the colony's expenditure on "native affairs" (Griffith, 1977). Murray was also instrumental in lobbying the Australian

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[2] Murray's brother, Gilbert, was Professor of Greek at Oxford University.

Government to create a position of Government Anthropologist for the Mandate Territory of New Guinea: the north-eastern part previously under German rule and entrusted to Australia by the League of Nations at the end of World War I. In 1924, this position was assigned to one of the most qualified candidates for the position in the Territory of Papua, Chinnery, who, besides conducting his own research and attending to his duties of part of the administration, acted as the gatekeeper for researchers such as Mead, Bateson, and Fortune himself.

Murray's search for scientific legitimation of his style of colonial administration led to the creation in 1926 of the first Chair of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, held by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, R. Firth (1931–1932) and A.P. Elkin (1932–1956). The newly funded department was explicitly established in order 'to provide a training in anthropology for cadets of the administration Territory of New Guinea, and to give other special intensive courses for the benefit of senior officers of the Mandated Territory, Papua and other administrations' (Firth, 1932, p. 2). The courses offered insisted on social structures, considered of primary practical value for the colonial administration, as stressed by Firth (1932, p. 7):

> As an ideal, one might look forward to an anthropological compendium listing every tribe or group of tribes of the Territory, and the principles of their cultural system, into which a harassed official might delve as a guide to his elucidation of cases of land tenure, return of presents and custody of children in divorce, and the like.

The training of the colonial personnel was the main source of income for the Department and thus crucial to its viability, but, thanks to funding from the Rockfeller Foundation, much research was conducted among Aboriginal communities in Australia of less practical orientation. The outcomes of such research found a publication venue in the Department's journal, *Oceania*.[3]

At this historical conjuncture, Australian anthropology was caught in a paradox. On one hand, the anthropology department at the University of Sydney was created with the clear goal to provide "technical" training to the colonial administration's personnel in the two Australian territories of

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[3] It is instructive to look at the impressive list of anthropological publications in just over a decade of the Department's life listed in Elkin, 1943.

New Guinea. On the other hand, the research interests of two of the Department's directors—Radcliffe-Brown and Elkin—were clearly oriented towards Aboriginal ethnography. As Peterson (1990) has astutely noted, it is in this period that a division of ethnographic labour in Australian academic anthropology began to gain its contour, progressively marginalising studies on Australian Aboriginal communities. A declining evolutionist paradigm, which saw in the Australian Aborigine the quintessential "primitive" and as such a precious source for the study of mankind's remote past, was still clutching onto this ethnographic area (Cowlishaw, 1987).[4] Meanwhile the territories of New Guinea and Papua were a laboratory for the functionalist paradigm, better suited for the purpose of administering colonies through "indirect rule" (Foks, 2018).

The bifurcation of Australian anthropology into Aboriginalist and Melanesianist ethnography was definitively marked by the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific theatre. When Japanese forces bombarded Pearl Harbour, the east-Asian country used its colonies in Micronesia as military bases and invaded the northernmost part of eastern New Guinea. Australia whose troops were engaged in other war theatres of the global conflict responded by regrouping in the Territory of Papua, which passed under military administration and repelled the enemy after a long military campaign that gathered the two territories under a single administration for the first time (Toyoda & Nelson, 2006). In this period, the role of social scientists was limited (Gray, 1994), but what is relevant is that a new generation of anthropologists was recruited by the military administration, thus bypassing the "anthropological monopoly" of the University of Sydney. In 1946, the Australian National University (hereinafter ANU) was founded in the national capital, Canberra, and the Research School of Pacific Studies (hereinafter RSPaS) was created (Firth, 1996), clearly marking the Government's priorities in terms of security.

The post-war years coincided with the "opening" of the Highlands of Australian New Guinea, an area that was barely reached by the colonial administration when the war broke out. With the return of the civil administration in the colony, the process of geographical exploration, contact and pacification of the groups of the island's interior could commence again. Melanesia, already a locale imbued with exoticism in Western imagination, promised a "virgin" field for a generation of anthropologists who

[4] On the links between ethnographic areas and theoretical agendas see Appadurai, 1988a, 1988b; Fardon, 1990.

could study societies that were barely influenced by the usual colonial agents.[5] As M. Strathern (1990) has convincingly argued, the relevance of the ethnographies of Papua New Guinea Highlands' societies resided in the empirical challenge it provided to the dominant paradigm of the descent groups elaborated by Africanist anthropologists (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940; see Barnes, 1962; Wagner, 1974), and provided anthropological theory with new models of political leadership such as the "big men" (A. Strathern, 1971). Yet, as Knauft (1990, 1993) points out, the overwhelming attention paid to the Highlands region of Papua New Guinea led to a disinterest in many coastal areas, which had experienced almost a century of colonial contact. This caused not only a mischaracterisation of the region, as the Highlands came to constitute an ideal-typical yardstick, but also the neglect of important socio-cultural phenomena like the local adoption of Christian practices and beliefs (Barker, 1990, 1992; Douglas, 2001a, 2001b).

The ANU, through the institution in 1961 of the New Guinea Research Unit (hereinafter NGRU) in Port Moresby, played a key role in facilitating research in the Australian colony of Papua and New Guinea at the wake of its independence which was achieved in 1975.[6] The long list of NGRU publications gives a snapshot of the variety of practical research conducted during this period. Amongst them we find two important monographs penned by M. Strathern, one of the most influential contemporary anthropologists and whose work has in part shaped the so-called ontological turn. These ethnographies, one about formal and informal village courts and the other on the experience of Hageners' urban migration to Port Moresby (respectively 1972; 1975), have a very different tone from her more famous and influential *The Gender of the Gift* (M. Strathern, 1988). This is another instance of the give and take relation of this ethnographic area and academic infrastructure with the wider theoretical advancement of the discipline globally.

The anti-communist hysteria of the Cold War also shaped the post-war era of Australian anthropology. In 1951, the Menzies Government called for a referendum to outlaw the Australian Communist Party and, more broadly, give power to the Federal Government to deal with communist affiliations. Although the referendum did not pass, there were other ways

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[5] A valuable retrospective on this period can be found in Hays, 1992.

[6] With independence, the NGRU became, after a few changes of name, Papua New Guinea's National Research Institute (see May, 2013).

in which the Government applied limitations to scholars with overt or suspected connections with or sympathies for communist parties. Worsley, following Gluckman's suggestion to head to the ANU for his doctorate, was denied an entry permit to New Guinea, where he was meant to conduct fieldwork, on the ground of MI5 (the British secret service) reports of his activities in Africa (Worsley, 2008, pp. 79–83; Gray, 2015). Worsley eventually completed his doctorate at the ANU, shifting his field site to the Gulf of Carpentaria and working on the Aboriginal kinship system, while much of the preliminary research he did for his fieldwork in Melanesia flowed into his seminal work on the so-called cargo cults (Worsley, 1957). Worsley's decision to make his case public made the Australian Government and ANU authorities more cautious in their handling of scholars suspected of communist sympathies (Gray, 2020). Gluckman was also denied entry to the Territory of Papua and New Guinea, even if only for a brief period of time. A.L. Epstein and his wife T. Scarlett also faced some difficulties conducting research in New Guinea. A.L. Epstein was part of the "Manchester School", and he came to the attention of the MI5 for his work with trade unionists in Northern Rhodesia (today Zambia) while conducting his pioneering urban ethnography. Scarlet was also suspected of communist sympathies from her early life in Vienna. Eventually the Epsteins obtained permission to work in New Guinea on the condition that they would not engage in active propaganda in the colony (Gray, 2020, p. 67), and held a position at the ANU from 1958 to 1972, when they moved back to Great Britain. It is worth pausing this historical account to take note of how the Aboriginalist/Melanesianist divide played out in the Government's perception of a threat from Indigenous people within the Australian colonial borders: 'Anthropologists planning to work in PNG [Papua New Guinea] were subject to vetting by ASIO [Australian Security Intelligence Organisation], but this was relaxed for Australian field sites' (Gray, 2020, p. 61). The case of Worsley is particularly instructive in this respect: denied access to New Guinea, he instead conducted research with Australian Aboriginal communities. Yet, the trajectory of Frederick Rose's anthropological career complicates such a simple dichotomy. English-born, Rose moved to Australia in 1937 where he first worked as a chemist and then for the Bureau of Meteorology. He conducted his fieldwork with Australian Aborigines alongside his job. Rose joined the Australian Communist Party in 1942 and left Australia in 1956 to join his wife in the German Democratic Republic, where he took a post in the anthropology department at Humboldt University, after appearing twice

before a royal commission on suspicion of being a Soviet spy (Monteath & Munt, 2015). Yet, Rose's academic trajectory out of Australia seems to be less tied to the potentially subversive influence on Aborigines than to his activities as a Commonwealth citizen.

If the Red Scare meant policing of the "internal" affairs through close scrutiny of scholars working in Australia and its colonies, at the international level, the political turmoil in nearby Indonesia was no less of a preoccupation. In 1949, after four years of military and diplomatic struggles, Holland recognised Indonesia as an independent nation state. Despite this recognition, the western half of New Guinea (today West Papua) remained a matter of bitter contestation between the former colonial power and the now independent Indonesia for two decades. In 1965, an attempted coup led by the PKI (Communist Party of Indonesia) threatened the long presidency of Sukarno. The Major General Suharto crushed the PKI through a violent anti-communist purge which passed to history as the Indonesian mass killings of 1965–1966. Suharto capitalised on this course of events and eventually took Sukarno's place in 1967. It was under Suharto's regime that, in 1969, West Papua became part of Indonesia as the province of Iran Jaya after a vote on the Act of Free Choice and the passing of United Nations Resolution 2504 (XXIV). The referendum was highly contentious and the Free Papua Movement has engaged in pro-independence confrontations with the Indonesian state ever since.[7] The combination of violent decolonisation, the threat of communist infiltration, and the instability in West New Guinea, which shares only an imaginary border with the soon to become independent Papua New Guinea, gave impetus to the addition of an Indonesianist specialisation to Australian anthropology (Robinson, 2009).

AFTER DECOLONISATION

With the expansion of the tertiary education sector in the 1960s and 1970s, anthropology programmes in Australia boomed and spread across the country. Following the genealogies and trajectories of each Department goes beyond the scope of this chapter. In what follows, I sketch some of the major trends in Australian anthropology, with no pretence of being exhaustive. In the Pacific region, the official end of colonial control over territories did not mean a complete break of ties between newly

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[7] An agile and informed overview can be found in Pouwer, 1999.

independent states and former colonial powers. Australia is no exception. Not only did it maintain close relations with Papua New Guinea, but it also extended its influence to other neighbouring Melanesian countries.

In the years when the process of decolonisation was on its way in Australia's overseas territories, a surge of Aboriginal activism swept the country. After much campaigning, Australian Aborigines, no longer "ward of the state" could vote for the Federal Government for the first time in 1963. In 1966, a group of Gurindji stockmen, led by their elders, walked off the Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory to claim their own land and to end the racially sanctioned overexploitation of their labour. The Gurindji Strike lasted until the recognition from the newly elected Labour government of their land rights in 1973 (Ward, 2016). This episode, along with other equally powerful actions such as the setting up of the "Tent Embassy" in front of the Parliament House in Canberra to highlight how Aboriginal people felt strangers in their own country, were important catalysts for the passing of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* of 1976 (limited, though, to the Northern Territory). Considering these long-brewing social, economic, and political issues, it is striking how Aboriginalist ethnography in those years still largely focused on "classic" themes and "traditional" communities.[8] As Cowlishaw (2017, p. 325 original italics) aptly notes, 'The social lives of *changed* Aboriginal people […] has never evoked the intellectual excitement of what was once known as primitivity and now as radical alterity'. Indeed, 'The foundational role of Aborigines in Australia's rural prosperity is rarely acknowledged, and pastoral workers held little interest for the disciplinary elite' (Cowlishaw, 2017, p. 335).[9] An important exception to the "classicism" of the time is Berndt's (2004) study of how people of Elcho Island tried to direct and negotiate change induced by colonial forces, especially Christianity (more recent examples of works bringing in the colonial framework of interlocutors' lives are Beckett, 1990; Rose, 1991). Stanner's collection of essays (1979) is an apt example of how the ambiguity of much mainstream Australian Aboriginalist anthropology, caught between the denunciation

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[8] It is important to signal the existence of a north/south regional variety within Aboriginalist ethnography; as Cowlishaw and Gibson (2012, p. 4) aptly noted, 'Work among Aboriginal people in the south of the continent […] has always attended to the disruptions and changes to what anthropologists had mostly represented as a coherent, unified entity called Aboriginal culture'.

[9] A common feature to Australian Aboriginalist and Melanesianist ethnography is the relative absence of class analysis.

of Aborigines' present conditions and a nostalgic idea of a "pure" Aboriginal culture that, once degraded, led to the present state of affairs. As Cowlishaw (2017, p. 330) aptly puts it, for many anthropologists 'From noble savages they [Aborigines] were rapidly transforming into the pathetic poor'. It was the work of historians such as Rowley (1970, 1971a, 1971b) and Reynolds (1981, 1999) to break "the great Australian silence" (Stanner, 1969), disquieting a placid public consciousness and embittering its conservative component, thus leading to the historiographical debate known as the "history wars" (Macintyre & Clark, 2003; see Cowlishaw, 2018). In 1982, a group of Meriem people (Torres Strait) lodged a land claim with High Court of Australia and the sentence passed overturned the legal fiction of the *terra nullius* leading to the Native Title Act of 1993. The passing of this Act meant a renewed scope for "classicist" Aboriginalist ethnography as anthropologists became expert witnesses and consultants for many land right claims. Issues of "authenticity" emerged, splitting the Australian anthropological community, such as the "Hindmarsh Island Bridge affair" (Weiner, 1995, 1997; Brunton, 1996; Tonkinson, 1997). Similar issues of the legal definition of landownership rights emerged also in Papua New Guinea bringing to the fore the issue of the "entification" (Ernst, 1999) of more fluid processes of the formation of social groups through the legal category of *Incorporated Land Group* (Weiner, 2013).

If Aboriginalist ethnography confronted issues of Indigenous sovereignty, in Papua New Guinea, where extractive capitalism is a major source of the State's revenues, conflicts between communities, corporations, and the State provided reasons to look for anthropological expertise.[10] Possibly the most striking episode was the civil war sparked by the harsh State repression of local protests against the Panguna mine, which led to difficult peace negotiations with the separatist movement in the Bougainville Province. Canberra-based scholars followed the development of the events as they were unfolding, from 1988 to 1998, and their rippling effects into the very recent present (Filer, 1990; Regan, 1998; Denoon, 2000). The significance of the conflict sparked by the Panguna mine, though, goes beyond the region; as Cochrane (2017) shows, this episode re-oriented Rio Tinto's policies towards local communities in its other operations.

[10] It is worth noting that this is one of the few themes where the two geographical areas of expertise received sustained comparison (Rumsey & Weiner, 2001a, 2001b; Weiner & Glaskin, 2007).

The presence of numerous mining activities in Papua New Guinea, paired with its characterisation as the *locus classicus* of anthropology, has led many anthropologists outside Australia to conduct their research on issues connected to resource extraction (Kirsch, 2006, 2014; Golub, 2014; Jacka, 2015). The geographical centrality of this area of the world for the anthropology of mining is best signalled by the fact that two Australian authors penned a landmark article on the *Annual Review of Anthropology* (Ballard & Glenn, 2003).

Australian academia has offered a crucial, though unsung, contribution to the no man's land that is historical anthropology. The ANU was the epicentre of this process after World War II, with the appointment of Davidson to the first chair of Pacific History in 1950. This historiography, in the programmatic statement of its founder (Davidson, 1955), marked a shift from the metropolitan focus of British Imperial History to the islands themselves (hence the name "island-oriented history"), looking in particular at the interactions between Islanders and Europeans; 'Our preponderant concern', writes Davidson (1966, p. 13), 'has been […] with the study of multi-cultural situations' which forced the practitioners of this historiography 'to use new forms of evidence, to involve himself in other men's ways, and to avoid interpreting men's actions in terms of patterns of his own culture' (ibid., p. 10). For Pacific historians, first-hand knowledge of the islands was highly desirable and even essential for those who incorporated oral narratives in their histories; one of the most sophisticated monographs that thread the fine line between oral history and ethnographic fieldwork is *Not the Way It Really Was* (Neumann, 1992). Since the late 1970s and 1980s, a group of historians at La Trobe University which Geertz (1990) dubbed "the Melbourne Group", played a significant role in the process of rapprochement between history and anthropology (Cohn, 1981).[11] The practice of "ethnographic history" (Isaac, 1980), akin to the Geertzian "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), contributed to the development of reading colonial texts against the grain in order to recover traces of local agency or what Douglas (2009) has called "Indigenous countersigns". For anthropologists of the Pacific, though, the name Dening is the most famous. Dening's work on cross-cultural encounters that the Marquesas Islands (Dening, 1980) mustered—the

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[11] Leading figures of the "Melbourne Group" were Inga Clenninden, Greg Dening, Rhys Isaac, and Donna Merwick.

clear differences between the two kinds of symbolic anthropology notwithstanding—a long-lasting intellectual exchange with Sahlins, who in the same decade published his influential *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* and *Islands of History* (Sahlins, 1981, 1985).

From the mutual influence of these two centres of historical research on the past of Pacific societies, a generation of historians has contributed to a grounded critique of the discipline arguing for a radical historicization of anthropological analysis (Thomas, 1996). Attending to the colonial formation of exchange practices deemed "traditional" by some anthropologists, Thomas (1991) has significantly contributed to the field of economic anthropology and the de-exoticisation of the region (see Carrier, 1992, 1995). From the same academic milieu emerged pioneering debates over the "invention of tradition" and its ideological function in the post- and neo-colonial present (Keesing & Tonkinson, 1982; Keesing, 1989; Jolly, 1992). As already mentioned above, the removal from the picture of what Balandier called "the colonial situation" (1951) made the local adoption of Christianity a blind spot for many anthropologists (Barker, 1990, 1992). As Douglas (Douglas, 2001a, 2001b) has argued, for many Melanesians, Christianity was indeed a "local" religion, and the few ethnographic works on Christian practices focused on spectacular rituals of possession more congenial to the ethnographic imagination than more mundane practices resulting from close to a century of interactions with missionaries. Interestingly, such critique prefigures some of the shortcomings of the recent sub-discipline of the "Anthropology of Christianity" championed by Robbins (2004) with his ethnography of Urapmin's conversion to Pentecostal Christianity in Papua New Guinea without the direct mediation of missionaries. The Urapmin's relatively recent colonial encroachment since the 1950s, most importantly the pacification of the area and the consequent disintegration of the ritual complex tying the Min living in this area of Papua New Guinea, the absence of a direct missionary presence, and the charismatic variety of Christianity Urapmin people converted to are all elements of that "gothic theatre" (Douglas, 2001b) that made Christianity a viable topic of ethnographic inquiry. The stress on conversion as a moment of radical rupture from the past, which Robbins (2007) vigorously and skilfully wields to challenge anthropology's "continuity thinking", is also the product of a particular historical conjuncture; the same emphasis is not to be found in other communities where Christianity has long since been adopted and internalised in more

mundane ways. Perhaps the insistence on "rupture" is one of the reasons why the other ethnographic region examined in this chapter has not entered the canon of the Anthropology of Christianity despite its ethnographic documentation among Australian Aborigines (Swain & Rose, 1988; see Schwartz & Dussart, 2010).

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

The case of Australian anthropology provides an apt testing ground for the relationship between the discipline and colonialism (including its new forms), and the knowledge/power nexus more generally. While the discipline's colonial past is now something widely acknowledged (Leclerc, 1972; Asad, 1973; Anthropological Forum, 1977) a historical investigation of the *nature* of such a relationship complicates the image of simple subservience. Colonial practical preoccupations mobilised funds to create institutions and Government positions in search of practical applications for anthropological knowledge, which seldom came to any substantial practical effect, as the case of Williams' experience as Government Anthropologist attests. The mutual legitimation between functionalism and colonial "indirect rule" hardly translated into complicity on the ground, as Fortune's case makes clear. Moreover, paying attention to the post-War years, rather than taking a broad temporal leap from pre-World War II to the present as much critique of the discipline does, enables a better appreciation of the continuities and discontinuities engendered by changed historical circumstances. The search for the exotic, which has characterised the research choices of anthropologists working with Australian Aborigines and in Melanesia, is another important node to grapple with when dealing with anthropology's search for legitimation. This calls into question the continuing centrality of the concept of "culture" as an explanatory tool (Cowlishaw, 2018, pp. 44–46) at the expense of in-depth historical and social analysis. One of the key lessons to be drawn from the Australian case is that it is the State (imperial, colonial, or however we want to label our current political forms) that enabled the space in which anthropological knowledge could be created, whether through universities and research institutes, or consultancy jobs which are particularly attractive to fund-starved universities. It therefore becomes imperative for the discipline to bring to the fore the politico-economic conditions of its own past and present existence.

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Gabriella D'Agostino • Vincenzo Matera
Editors

Histories of Anthropology

Editors
Gabriella D'Agostino
Department of Cultures and Societies
University of Palermo
Palermo, Italy

Vincenzo Matera
Department of Languages, Literatures,
Cultures and Mediations
University of Milano
Milan, Italy