Thematic Section
Cultural and Political Imagination in Indigenous Communities in Canada and Australia

Introduction

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This issue marks the continuation of a symposium presented, in collaboration with Nicolas Peterson, at the annual conference of the Canadian Anthropology Society (CASCA) which was held at Carleton University (Ottawa) in 2008. The goal of the symposium was to bring together anthropologists working with indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia so as to foster exchange and dialogue and, eventually, build the foundation for a comparative outlook on indigenous issues in the two countries. Several researchers accepted our invitation and played their part in a very successful symposium. The symposium participants who unfortunately could not contribute to the present issue of *Anthropologica* were: Naomi Adelson, Michael Asch, Alexandra Beaulieu, John Carty, Harvey Feit and Nicolas Peterson. We wish to thank them for their stimulating and enriching contribution and their participation in this dialogue.

By cultural and political imagination, we mean the ways by which indigenous peoples have, since their first encounters with colonists till today, reproduced and transformed their worlds as these have now become irremediably entangled with state policies and agendas, modern and neoliberal values, and national and global commercial interests in their territories. In the ways they reimagine their worlds and identities and interact with the larger society, indigenous peoples practice multiple forms of resistance, accommodation and engagement, both as historical subjects and cultural actors (Austin-Broos and Macdonald 2005; Blaser et al. 2004; Scott 2001; Taylor et al. 2005). These practices, alongside the fractures, constraints, suffering and disillusionment stemming from their colonization, have greatly defined their contemporaneity (Poirier 2000) and life projects (Blaser 2004) and are contributing to a renewal of their difference.

Several parallels can be established between Canada and Australia in the field of indigenous studies. Both countries were creations of the British colonial empire and the history of their relations between the state and

indigenous peoples have many similarities. In both countries, colonial history, the declaration of sovereignty, successive policies concerning indigenous peoples, and state practices of dispossession and colonization followed very similar ideological routes. As of the middle of the 19th century, so-called protection policies were introduced by respectively establishing reserves in Canada and missions and government communities in Australia. Was it not one of the hidden agendas of these policies to force indigenous peoples to become sedentary and gradually dispossess them of their territories in favour of colonists and non-indigenous interests? In Canada, the assimilation policies that were later imposed gave rise to residential schools for all Native, school-aged children, who were then taken from their families and lifeways. In Australia, certain missions and government communities set up dormitories for school-aged children to remove them from their parents' influence. Mixed race children were forcefully taken from their Aboriginal families all over Australia to be raised in the white people's world. Australians now call these children the "stolen generation."

The international decolonization movements of the 1970s pushed Canada and Australia to implement self-determination and self-management policies. These policies have allowed indigenous peoples to engage in political negotiations and land claims so as to have specific rights and ancestral titles recognized. As we will see in Goulet's example of the Dene Tha, these processes are long, arduous, and full of pitfalls, paradoxes and disillusionment, but also sometimes contain "victories." To conclude this brief overview, we might add that when the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples in September 2007, Canada and Australia, along with the United States and New Zealand, spoke out against the declaration and refused to sign. The Australian government under Rudd has since, however, changed its position. In both Canada and Australia, present-day indigenous situations can only be understood in light of the successive policies and subsequent responses of indigenous peoples at the local, regional, and national levels.

There is another parallel between the two countries: their difficult and ambiguous relationship with the "difference" of the indigenous other. Authors have already pointed out the limits that democratic and liberal states face when they must deal with difference and otherness (Povinelli 2002). Moreover, the presence and difference of their indigenous and still colonial subjects pose a particular problem for the construction of a homogeneous nation, be it Australian or Canadian (Macdonald 2008:354). In both countries, indigenous differences are, more often than not, described in public discourse in terms of "dysfunctions," "disadvantages," "problems" or "inabilities." The differences of indigenous peoples are seen as "failures" on their part to meet the requirements of modernity and to accept neoliberal values (see Tonkinson and Tonkinson, and Macdonald in this issue; Poirier In press). Such statements and perceptions are supported by education, health, employment and housing figures that denote "statistical inequality." It is not our purpose here to deny that indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia are faced with major social problems, including abuse, violence and suicide. Colonization, marginalization and the denial of their social and ontological world are not unrelated to these problems (Samson 2004). The reality of present-day indigenous peoples cannot however be reduced to these problems and the suffering they engender. Indigenous groups have moreover begun the process of "social healing" and have undertaken local initiatives and responses to their physical, psychological, and spiritual suffering that is in keeping with their values, their ways of being-in-the-world and their moral and ontological principles (see Jérôme in this issue; Tanner 2004).

As can be seen from the ethnographic examples provided by the authors in this issue, several parallels can be drawn between the colonial and neocolonial experiences of the two countries' indigenous peoples. The last 30 years of self-determination and self-management policies in Canada and Australia have changed indigenous peoples' socialities, subjectivities and agencies. Indigenous peoples have responded in disparate ways to the implementation of these policies. The complex entanglement between Western and indigenous values, between state regulations and laws on the one hand and customary social and political structures on the other has shaped these culturally constituted responses. These in turn have given rise to forms, spaces and expressions that swing from autonomy and affirmation to dependence and "standardization."

The land question remains a fundamental issue in both countries with regard to relations among indigenous peoples, their political leaders and different levels of government. Ancestral lands, as well as the intimate relationship that the majority of indigenous groups have with them, are still a major component of the indigenous world, identity, historicity and sociality. This despite the fact that these groups have been "invited" in various ways to give up their land—be it socially, politically, ecologically or economically—for the benefit of national or international economic interests. As for land claims and political negotiations, they continue to be based on the political and judicial structures of the colonizing state (see Goulet and Thom in

this issue), thereby perpetuating feelings of injustice, misunderstanding and marginalization among indigenous peoples. Not only is the de-colonization process excruciatingly slow, but the Canadian and Australian states are continuing with their colonization practices and "standardization" strategies concerning indigenous peoples, with the stated goal of changing them into modern subjects who will be able to respond more "appropriately" to the state's expectations and to neoliberal values (see Tonkinson and Tonkinson, and Macdonald in this issue).

This Issue

The indigenous groups discussed in this issue include the: Dene Tha (Goulet), Coast Salish First Nation (Thom), Wiradjuri (Macdonald), Mardu (Tonkinson and Tonkinson), Warlpiri (Dussart) and Atikamekw (Jérôme). Based on an in-depth ethnographic inquiry, each author looks at an aspect of contemporary Amerindian and Aboriginal worlds and highlights some of the challenges and misunderstandings that indigenous peoples in the two countries must deal with in their interactions with the state and in their consideration of modern Western values.

A few recurrent themes stand out in the texts. Of particular note is the persistence in indigenous cultures of a sociality founded on kin-based relationships and networks, which have a permanent effect on indigenous social, economic and political practices, interactions and reflexes. One of the fundamental questions addressed by the majority of the authors is thus the distinction between kin-based societies and civil society. Each of these societies produces and values different forms of subjectivity and sociality, and thus different notions of the person and being-in-the-world, as well as different types of responsibilities and obligations. The indigenous peoples now find themselves torn between two different ways of being: one which puts the accent on relations with, obligations to, and responsibilities toward kin, ancestors, and land; and another, that of the civil society, which puts the emphasis on individualism. This difficult coexistence could be attenuated by the recognition, at the political level, of multiple ontologies (Clammer et al. 2004). Another question that arises concerns the extent to which indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia have, since their forced sedentarization, developed a feeling of belonging to sedentary "communities." How have they re-imagined—in the context of these communities and in a limited territory—the social networks that are based on kinship and alliances, on belonging and solidarity?

Other themes addressed by the authors are worthy of note: the preservation and resonance of the ontological principle of "relationality" in indigenous worlds; the issue of cultural resistance, that is the complex and subtle processes of cultural persistence in response to domination and marginalization; the issue of the indigenous difference and the difficulties of "translating," reconciling and negotiating these cultural differences in modern and liberal nation-states. Indeed, is it not one of the main responsibilities for anthropologists in this field—an expression of their political engagement—to "translate" this difference into more easily understandable terms?

The issues of political demands, land claims and governance are examined by several authors. Using the example of the Dene Tha in Alberta, Goulet convincingly describes for us, through a diachronic perspective, the long and difficult battle they have fought to have their rights and interests in ancestral lands recognized. The colonial ideology that, based on thinkers such as Locke, has justified dispossessing indigenous peoples of their land still persists. Goulet relates the strategies deployed by the Canadian state for more than 100 years to affirm and preserve its sovereignty over Dene Tha land, as well as the initiatives undertaken by the Dene Tha to protect their collective rights and interests. While the tools used in the negotiations have been those of the colonizing state, namely its language, instruments and paradigms, Goulet shows how the Dene Tha, like other indigenous groups, have learned to decipher these tools and use them to pursue their own social projects. The balance of power, however, remains clearly lopsided, and as such, any indigenous "victory," like that of the Dene Tha against the pipeline of the Mackenzie Valley Gas Project, is one small example of the indigenous politics of hope.

Thom, Macdonald and the Tonkinsons examine the more specific issue of governance in indigenous communities. These authors illustrate how indigenous conceptions of authority, governance, autonomy and responsibility clash with or, at least, diverge from those of modern, liberal states, civil society and bureaucratic culture. They also point out the gaps that exist between governments' and indigenous peoples' expectations concerning self-determination.

Like Goulet, Thom employs a diachronic perspective to relate the continuities, changes, and entanglements that characterize the current political and decisional structures of the Coast Salish First Nations in British Columbia. The complex entanglement stems from multiple forms of power, leadership and decision-making. These forms have different sources including: traditional ways based on kin-networks and territorial connections; Indian Act impositions, in particular band councils; and current Native land claims and demands. Thom analyzes the reticence of members of the Coast Salish First Nations to

form a regional Native government and fully adopt a democratic approach to representation. These larger political groups, which are "anathema" to them, are seen by this Native people to be more of a risk than an opportunity. They believe this structure might undermine the autonomy and decision-making authority of local groups founded on kin-based networks and conflict with and even endanger the principles of fluidity and flexibility that characterize their political structures, groupings and traditional solidarity. Thom also reminds us that the issue of governance is enigmatic and complex due to the coexistence, in the current context, of different types of land rights and interests, namely those stemming from custom and those defined and recognized in agreements and treaties with provincial and federal governments. The idioms employed in Western culture and modern nation-states to describe land ownership in terms of fixed boundaries and exclusive use contrast with the flexibility paradigm that marks the indigenous land tenure approach. Are these self-determination and self-management policies, government structural and organizational expectations and bureaucratic culture impositions not, in themselves, a form of neocolonial violence in Canada and Australia?

There are several similarities in the analyses and observations of Thom and Macdonald, most notably those concerning indigenous peoples' resistance to exogenous authority and hierarchy structures that are likely to undermine the relational logic, autonomy and decision-making power of local people and groups. MacDonald bases her inquiry on the experience of the Wiradjuri, an Aboriginal people from the rural regions of New South Wales, and looks at the "cultural process" of colonization in three different forms: namely the colonization of land (in the 19th century), the colonization of bodies (in segregation and assimilation policies), and the current colonization of personhood (through self-management policies). An in-depth historical and ethnographic analysis helps us understand how the Wiradjuri, as colonial subjects, were able to reproduce and re-imagine their world and cultural practices. In their interactions and engagements with sheep farmers and despite their land being colonized, the Wiradjuri maintained social and spatial autonomy up to the middle of the 20th century, reproducing the values of reciprocity and sharing based on obligations toward and responsibilities for kin networks (see also Peterson 1993, 2008). This situation changed, however, with the imposition of self-management policies, bureaucratic values and their associated decision-making authority and processes. Macdonald presents the current self-management policies as an insidious and violent form of colonization in as much as they specifically aim to control and colonize the person—rather than just land—and to transform that person into a modern, individualistic subject. The underlying logic of the organizational and decision-making structures of self-management—where bureaucratic culture dominates and accountability requirements directly impact the relationships between persons and even the very definition of a person—is one in which individualism wins out over social relations. Macdonald writes, "aboriginal people were unprepared—in any sense of the term—to become subjects of liberal democracy which required that they exchange their kin-relations for bureaucratic ones" (see also Nadasdy 2003 for a Canadian example). It is in this sense that she speaks of "ontological violence."

The Tonkinsons, who have spent many years attempting to better understand the Western Desert Mardu and their responses to Australian state policies and expectations, now describe the gulf between these people's values and those of Western culture as being unbridgeable. The disparities and disjunctures between hunter gatherers' values and those of civil society and capitalism are a source of tension and discomfort. Despite their marginalization however, the Mardu, like other Aboriginal groups, seem determined to uphold their "difference." The Tonkinsons analyze the Mardu's difference in their relationship to work, education, leadership and ownership. Two aspects of this difference are worthy of our attention. With regard to paid work, not only is the Mardu's educational level considerably lower than the national average, but they do not hesitate to leave a job, for varying lengths of time, in order to meet their kin responsibilities or ceremonial obligations such as initiation or funeral rites. More often than not, however, these responsibilities imply travel, which brings us to the second aspect, mobility, a theme which is also discussed by Dussart and, to a lesser extent, by Goulet. In the current context, the Mardu's mobility, though redefined by the use of modern transportation among other things, is still considerable. It meets the demands of hunting and gathering, of visits to kin living in towns or cities near or far, and of participation in ritual ceremonies and gatherings. For the Mardu and several other indigenous groups, in both Canada and Australia, this mobility allows them to consolidate and reproduce their social networks and ties to the land. As Dussart tells us about the Warlpiri, this mobility is a form of "nourishment." Civil servants, on the other hand, see it as a "difference" to be controlled and eventually eradicated.

More specifically, Dussart and Jérôme look at indigenous responses to illness and suffering in local well-being

and healing practices. Dussart eloquently evokes the ontological obstacles and incompatibilities between Aboriginal forms of subjectivity and sociality and those of Western culture, in particular with regard to illness and the biomedical system. In Australia as in Canada, there is a high rate of diabetes among indigenous peoples. Dussart, who works with the Warlpiri in Australia's Central Desert, analyzes how people with diabetes are incessantly torn between their biomedical responsibilities as advised by their medical practitioners, namely regularly taking medication and limiting travel, and their social and cosmological responsibilities toward their kin, land and ritual activities. As we saw with the Mardu, the Warlpiri must travel regularly in often difficult conditions to fulfil these responsibilities. As Dussart has observed, diabetics, in spite of their physical suffering, more often than not choose to "look after" their social relations rather than "look after" their physical well-being. This attitude evokes the discrepancy between the sovereign and individualistic self and the relational self for whom social relations with kin, land or ancestors make up the person (Poirier 2008). Taking care of these relations contributes not only to the person's well-being but also to his or her raison d'être. This is what the Warlpiri people mean when they say that "it is hard to be sick now." It is not so much because of the physical suffering arising from the illness, but rather because of the difficulties that diabetics have maintaining and "nourishing" the social relations and ritual obligations on which Warlpiri identity and being are founded.

Jérôme evokes the pan-Amerindian social healing movement, taking as an example the Atikamekw, an Algonquian group from central-northern Québec. This movement has expanded in Canada's Native communities over the last 30 years in response to both the individual and collective suffering that has followed from colonization, dispossession and assimilation policies. At the community level, this healing movement is being expressed through a renewal in traditional ritual practices that were dropped in the conversion to Catholicism and that are now being re-appropriated and reinterpreted. Jérôme focuses his attention on three ritual practices: the first steps ceremony, the sweat lodge and the powwow. He shows how each one of these practices contributes, in the context of sedentary communities, to restoring social ties and re-imagining traditional forms of sociality and solidarity. Jérôme also takes us to another area that is somewhat neglected by anthropologists, that of the laughter, mockery and humour that occurs not only in daily events and social relations, but also in ritual contexts and practices. Games, laughter and festivities thus appear as the "relational principles" of ritual. They also sometimes guarantee their effectiveness. The Atikamekw, he writes, master the art of laughing *with* and *about* someone. The art of laughter is an integral part of the art of living for the Atikamekw, a fact which could apply to several other Amerindian and Aboriginal peoples.

The ethnographic analyses and inquiries that the authors in this issue have provided allow us to better appreciate how and why indigenous peoples resist their expected "ontological transformation," and in ways that differ according to place, colonial trajectories and socially and culturally specific configurations. The fact that indigenous peoples rarely respond to state policies in an expected manner, that they continue to employ affirmation, resistance, and engagement practices and strategies by taking often unforeseen and innovative paths, and that they renew their difference without losing it (Austin-Broos 2003) should also stimulate our anthropological imaginations and allow us to re-imagine and even de-colonize our own conceptual and methodological paradigms.

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