BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS

Whitefella Comin': Aboriginal Responses to Colonialism in Northern Australia
David S. Trigger
New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. xi + 250 pp. $59.95 (cloth)

Reviewer: Peter Carstens
University of Toronto

David Trigger has made a significant contribution to modern social science, particularly the study of the complex nature of colonialism. This is a scholarly case study of Doomagee, an Aboriginal reserve settlement and mission station (with an unspecified number of missionaries, White officials and others) in northern Australia. We are introduced to Doomagee and the surrounding region through its early pre-colonial history, the frontier years of Aboriginal-White interaction, the history of state control, and the multiplex influences of Christian missionary endeavour. Various other major themes are developed. These include power relations between different socio-cultural domains, status and political identity among Aborigines, hegemony and resistance, the general inequality between Aboriginals and Whites, etc.

Nowhere does the author focus on any idea of community, real or imagined, and we assume that he does not find the concept useful. Readers must therefore be prepared to construct it themselves from the text and the excellent photographs and illustrations. But the avoidance of community paradigms may well have its virtue in works of this kind because it prevents sterile analyses of artificially isolated socio-cultural entities. Trigger is more concerned with the operation of "power relations and social action" between Aboriginals and Whites in a wide spatio-temporal arena.

This is a study of reaction *in* conquest which aims at sorting out the variables of *coercion, resistance, hegemony* and *accommodation*. Trigger is a careful field worker who did not allow himself to conclude that all Aboriginals were completely powerless and compliant to White domination. His detailed analysis of the two major domains of social life in Doomagee elaborates and clarifies this conclusion. The *Blackfella* and *Whitefella* domains, as they are referred to locally, are distinguished by their respective material, intellectual and social activity arenas—arenas that produce *inter alia* high degrees of social distance. In Doomagee the cleavage between Blackfellas and Whitefellas is most evident in the mission reserve settlement where there is de facto residential segregation. But there are more crucial factors that determine social distance ranging from the fact that there is no intermarriage to Aboriginal perception that the *mission* (where the Whites live), as opposed to the *village*, is the locale of both White and Christian values. (Often it is difficult to decide what is cause and what is effect.) Closely related to this theme is the position of *Yellafellas* (mixed race) in the community. There it emerges that the philosophy behind this classification in the White or Aboriginal domains is based more on social and cultural factors than on race. Hence, Yellafellas tend to be judged by Blackfellas according to their personal and social identities: "He don't class himself as Yellafella" implies that a particular mixed-race person might be regarded as an Aboriginal if he meets appropriate social requirements. Thus, although Aborigines do make distinctions between Black, Yellow and White people, they do so in situationally constructed terms. Trigger concludes his discussion

of two domains with an analysis of social closure as a manifestation of resistance to the White world. "The Aboriginal domain," he writes, "can be regarded as at least in part an arena of resistance to the colonial imperative of assimilating the colonised to the beliefs and practices of the colonising society" (p. 101). But clearly this does not deal with the whole picture because so much of the conception of the Blackfella domain is derived from Aboriginal tradition.

This question of the continuation of certain features of Aboriginal culture in the context of the modern state introduces a new dimension to Trigger's work. Of special importance is the discussion of identity within the Aboriginal domain (chap. 6). What emerges is a diversity of *identities* at the local level. The complex manner in which conflicting allegiances are sorted out produces a semblance of harmony, if not political unity, in the community. Thus, while each of the many language and dialects carries with it a status of its own reflecting a particular social position, the mere fact that many people still speak a native tongue provides a measure of "Aboriginalness" in general. Similarly, claiming traditional knowledge of land-related matters produces hierarchies with their inherent tensions to be solved at the community level. The manner in which the use of traditional kinship terms by individuals in the modern world is evaluated by the community provides a further example of the potential for conflict and its resolution. The picture is, moreover, complicated by the senior age category (elders) to whom special high status is afforded—a status which is capable of cross-cutting other claims to status and honour. Unfortunately, this intriguing material on the contradictions between conflict and consensus is not fully analyzed and the author passes up the opportunity of introducing Gluckman's and Simmel's ideas in his ethnography. In a similar vein, one might hope for a second volume from Trigger at some future date to satisfy the comparativists in social science. The appropriate parallels in the Canadian and Southern African literature with the Doomagee material are theoretically too significant to ignore.

Visayan Vignettes: Ethnographic Traces of a Philippine Island
Jean-Paul Dumont
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992. xix + 226 pp. $39.95 (cloth), $16.95 (paper)

Reviewer: Catherine (Rineke) Coumans
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Dumont's title signals the reader that here one may find an example of the widely discussed, but still rarely written, "new" ethnography. By "crossing over" and drawing on a term traditionally associated with impressionistic tales in the humanities, "vignettes," and emphasizing the partial nature of his work by referring to its ethnographic accounts as "traces," Dumont clearly breaks with the boldly definitive and unself-consciously positivistic titles of most modernist ethnographies. Dumont maintains that his title presents a more accurate reflection of the contents of his book, the stories he heard and now relates, and of the ethnographic process by which anthropological insights are acquired (p. 1).

Dumont's misgivings about the conventional ethnographic format are epitomized by traditional introductions. Introductions inevitably pre(fix) a text in which ethnographic