

certain questionnement sur la fiabilité de l'information que l'auteur manipule.

Jeffrey Sissons, *First Peoples: Indigenous Cultures and Their Future*, London: Reaktion books, 2005, 174 pages.

Reviewer: *Kristín Loftsdóttir*
University of Iceland

The title of Sissons' book suggests an affiliation with romantic and 'traditional' notions of indigenous people—I, at least, placed it within that genre. This book is, however, completely different. Being highly analytical, it gives a fresh and critical perspective on current discourses of indigenous people while simultaneously taking a strong political stand. The book is very well written, engaging with contemporary theories of issues such as nationalism, race and authenticity, in addition to addressing the more obvious issues of land and autonomy. Even though he does not situate himself as such, Sissons' argument throughout the book is highly post-structuralistic, and yet he stands with his feet firmly on the ground.

The first chapter, titled "Indigenism," firmly locates the subject matter within contemporary politics and debates, as Sissons' definition of indigenous cultures demonstrates. He argues that these are "cultures that have been transformed through the struggles of colonized peoples to resist and redirect projects of settler nationhood" (p. 15). Indigenism is a form of global politics, addressing specific issues that are "grounded in relationships between indigenous cultures and post-settler nationhood" (p. 25). Statements such as: "Indigeneity has become more than a heritage; like settler nationhoods, it too is now a project" (p. 13), skillfully associate indigenous people with something on the move, belonging to the present and the future as does any other identity.

Definitions of indigenous people have been somewhat at the forefront for the last few years (Bowen 2000), especially following debates arising from Adam Kuper's paper "The Return of the Native" (2003). The meaning of the term indigenous has become increasingly confused and contested. Labelling the more romantic notions of indigenous people "eco-indigenism," Sissons claims that they entail a profound shift away from the original meaning of the indigenous, and undermine the original goals of the coining of the term (p. 17). The current orientation shares similarities with Edward Said's orientalism in that cultural otherness is reproduced. The dissimilarity lies, however, in that indigenous people tend to participate in the construction of their own otherness (p. 30). At the end of the book, Sissons openly criticizes international legal forums and what he labels "United Nation talk-fests" for their preoccupation with defining indigenous people at the expense of analyzing "the realities of political power and accommodation" (p. 128).

The succeeding chapters address more specific issues but are highly interwoven with the ground laid in the first chap-

ter. The chapters "Oppressive Authenticity" and "Urban Indigeneity" deconstruct dominant ideas of indigenous purity and authenticity, as rooted in colonial racism. The policies of the 1886 Victoria Act and Aboriginal Protection Act in 1909 in Australia, the Dawes Act in 1887 in the United States, and The Indian Act in 1876 in Canada, all in one way or another served to assimilate and culturally eliminate indigenous people, based on ideas of purity of blood, leaving among other things so-called mixed individuals without rights to land and resources. The obsession with blood purity, Sissons points out, still forms the basis of many contemporary policies regarding indigenous people, pressuring these communities to maintain some kind of "racial" purity in addition to excluding large numbers of people from the community. In this political environment, urbanity is regarded as an "anomalous condition for indigenous people" (p. 39), as urban indigenous become people "out of place." Sissons correctly points out that many observers only see cultural loss in the urbanization of indigenous communities, whereas the situation can be better described as one of cultural creativity within conditions of impoverishment. Sissons' comment is on the mark and can be placed within the context of migrant workers in general where migration of various communities to urban centres has too often been characterized in negative terms, ignoring agencies which accompany marginalization (Rain 1999; Loftsdóttir 2002).

The chapter "Indigenous Children" focusses on the policies and praxis of assimilation, where children were primary targets. The unspeakable brutality of forcefully removing "mixed" children from their parents permitted by the Aboriginal Protection Act in Australia is incomprehensible but in no way unique (p. 44). Sissons demonstrates that the violence against the children was an intrinsic part of a broader project that aimed at destroying communities and alienating people from land. He stresses that the policies of assimilation cannot be separated from policies of land: "by thinking assimilation and settlement together we also highlight the fact that assimilation...physically separated people from each other and their environment in order that others might take their place" (p. 90). Turning the focus to contemporary indigenous schools, he gives a historical outline of the education legacy which these schools need to overcome, thereby outlining some of the challenges facing these schools.

The last two chapters, "Indigenous Citizens" and "Indigenous Recovery," place indigenous people firmly within contemporary nation-states, demonstrating the paradoxical situation of indigenous people where their "continued economic and political independence is dependent upon the economic and political support of the post-settler states" (p. 115), partly because the reserves and marginal environments to which they are confined are not capable of sustaining self-sufficiency. Sissons criticizes the idea that relations between post-settler nations and indigenous people should be conceived as "nation-to-nation" relationships, seeing it as ethnocentric and as fundamentally misrepresenting "the true nature of indigenous sovereignty" (p. 125). He suggests a number of possible

avenues for the future, claiming that indigenous repossession can be understood as the initial stages of postcolonialism—referring to a process involving disengagement of the colonized and colonizers from their previous relationship (p. 154). His overall discussion stresses that the identities which indigenous people seek to gain control over are not the identities that have been lost, but the “ability to be diversely authentic in a rejection of racism and essentialism that characterized the settlers’ regimes of identification” (p. 148).

The book is part of *Focus on Contemporary Issues* (FOCI) series which, according to the book jacket, addresses “pressing problems, ideas and debates.” The book lacks an index which would have made it more accessible and I felt that the references included were rather scant considering the dense theoretical context of Sissons’ argument. This could be due to an attempt to make the book more accessible to non-academics. The text is still extremely well written and the placement of the footnotes and references at the end of the book probably aims at making it more user friendly. Nevertheless, non-academics may find the book difficult because of its theoretical complexity. It does not offer a literature review or theoretical overview, which could make the text less accessible for less experienced students, although it would have served more advanced students well.

Overall, I read this book with great pleasure and would recommend it not only to those interested in indigenous issues, but also those engaging theoretically with ethnicity, nationality and contemporary racism.

References

- Bowen, John R.
 2000 Should We Have Universal Concept of “Indigenous Peoples” Rights? Ethnicity and Essentialism in the Twenty-First Century. *Anthropology Today* 16(4):12-16.
- Kuper, Adam
 2003 The Return of the Native. *Current Anthropology* 44: 389-402.
- Loftsdóttir, Kristin
 2002 “Knowing What to Do in the City”: WoDaaBe Nomads and Migrant Workers in Niger. *Anthropology Today* 18(1):9-13.
- Rain, David
 1999 *Eaters of the Dry Season: Circular Labor Migration in the West African Sahel*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Bruce Granville Miller, ed., *Be of Good Mind: Essays on the Coast Salish*, Vancouver and Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2007, 321 pages.

Reviewer: *Mark Ebert*
University of Saskatchewan

The late Wayne Suttles has had a significant influence on Northwest Coast scholarship and, in particular, Coast Salish studies. It is nearly impossible to do research in the region

without being familiar with his 1987 collection of essays and his edited Northwest Coast volume of the *Handbook of North American Indians* (1990). A decade and a half after the publication of the handbook, Bruce Granville Miller has taken stock of the current state of Coast Salish research in the edited volume *Be of Good Mind*. This volume includes authors from a variety of backgrounds—both academic and, reflecting the research contexts in the region, indigenous. As Miller suggests, “it is equally important to consider the viewpoints of Aboriginal peoples themselves and how Aboriginal peoples have influenced scholarly perspectives” (p. 5).

This mutual exchange and influence is best represented in the chapters by Stó:lō Director and Cultural Advisor *Na'xaxalhts'i*, Albert (Sonny) McHalsie and the historian Keith Thor Carlson. McHalsie’s chapter is a refreshing example of the indigenous perspective he learned through his work at Stó:lō Nation, and provides a nice respite from the more academic chapters. McHalsie’s anecdote about how he learned the meaning of being of good mind through being taken by Carlson to Easter Mass illustrates the longstanding relationship between them. This intercultural sharing of faith, McHalsie points out, is important to “being of good mind.” Carlson, on the other hand, is concerned with the idea of “collective identities” and how historical movements and events have played a “major role” in the formation of these post-contact identities. Carlson’s chapter is one of the best chapters in this book. His approach to the subject of history and historiography is innovative and this chapter reflects his 15 years of working with the Stó:lō peoples and his sensitivity to the indigenous perspective.

A small drawback of the book is that many chapters focus on the Canadian side, even though one of Miller’s aims for *Be of Good Mind* is to address the shortcoming in the earlier literature, which failed to explore “the connections between communities and individuals across the entire Coast Salish world” (pp. 6-7). One of the better examples of this is Alexandra Harmon’s wonderfully written chapter which discusses the issue of whether a single, inclusive Coast Salish history and identity is possible. Previous scholarship on the “Coast Salish” is reviewed to highlight the point that while the label apparently originated among anthropologists and linguists, there have been no published histories that include all the peoples who fall within this category. Harmon proposes that such a history is possible, and argues that “a good way to see the historical utility of the broad Coast Salish classification is to focus on the smallest possible unit of analysis: the individual” (p. 33). Taking this focus, Harmon makes an initial foray into such a history through a discussion of George Swanaset, an intriguing figure whose life history was recorded by Paul Fetzer. While Suttles’ notion of the “social continuum” is only mentioned by Harmon in passing, that and Jay Miller’s (1999) notion of “anchored radiance” would have added to her to her discussion.

Daniel Boxberger’s contribution points out that from its earliest period the “anthropology of the Coast Salish has been