

Searching for the Intercultural, Searching for the Culture

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ABSTRACT

This paper questions a dominant view of culture as being relatively bounded and hermetic by questioning the concept of an intercultural domain that is brought into existence as a necessary consequence of this view. The paper suggests that recognition of cultural processes does not lead to the need to posit 'a culture' which is constituted by them. The view that 'a culture' is a relatively autonomous, relatively hermetic and relatively homeostatic entity arises, this paper argues, in the birth of nationalism and the founding years of anthropology, which are intimately linked. This approach, characterised here as modernist, is criticised for failing to deal well with complex cultural relationships. It results in the need to theorise an intercultural space, or a realm of cultural change, between cultures theorised as entities. Here the later work of Malinowski is used as an exemplar. The paper argues for alternative conceptualisations, such as Gluckman's suggestion that intercultural relations occur within social fields which are the proper subject of anthropology, and Strathern's contention that 'society' is a redundant concept, yet not denying 'sociality'. The case of the Aboriginal people of Broome in their struggle with the state over the terms in which their prior rights to land will be recognised is used to illustrate this.

Francesca Merlan (this volume) contrasts two views of 'the intercultural' which I also want to examine here. Merlan's own use of the term 'intercultural' borrows the 'inter' from 'intersubjective', that is, relations that occur within the same field or on the same ground, or as Paul de Man puts it, 'grounded in a common sentiment' (de Man 1986:21). A more common approach to the intercultural is activity that occurs 'between cultures' or 'between two worlds'. This relies on a view of culture as relatively hermetic, self-referring and discrete. Here, 'culture', the effect of human interaction, produces 'cultures', human society as an artefact. While cultural interaction can certainly thicken into relatively stable configurations, to talk of 'a culture', is to use a noun without referent since 'the culture', I argue here, doesn't exist as such. It is a construct of the modernist mode of thought brought to explanatory efficacy in a particular political climate. How we view culture, and the interaction of presumed cultures, governs our approach to intercultural politics in areas such as appropriate governance and the recognition of cultural rights. The practical implementation of cultural rights in appropriate political expressions has arrived at a dead-end because of the application, explicitly or by absorption, of modernist views of social functioning which produce, on the one hand hermetic cultures with rights, and incidentally, a problematic space between them. By critically interrogating the construction of this space as to its historical production and its own consistency we can question the construct of the 'cultures' themselves which intersect in this theorised intercultural space. Ultimately we should be able to open up a new discourse on approaches to political rights drawing on alternative conceptions brought to prominence by the critique of cultures and the intercultural.

Alternative views tend to go by terms which simply say what they are ranged against, for instance post-structuralism, postmodernism or deconstructionism. These terms cover a range of theorists and a wide variety of works, but they have common characteristics. According to Henrietta Moore this

new work in anthropology figures culture as a series of sites of contested representation and resistance within fields of power. The notion of culture as an autonomous entity has been undermined, and that critique has inevitably resulted in a challenge to other spatialized entities and the identities predicated upon them: for example, the nation-state (Moore 1999:11–12).

These could be called 'relational' theorists, as a way of distinguishing them from modernist modes of thought, because their concern is more with exploring the relations of phenomena which produce a 'culture effect' in any given instance than the mechanism of a distinct artefact, the 'culture' and its intersection with other distinct cultures.

It is useful here to briefly outline what I mean by modernist modes of thought and the place of the relational theoretical orientation in the development of anthropology. Postmodernism has had at least one useful consequence. In the fight-back of neo-modernism (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:ix-xi; see Knauff 1996:9–39), which aims to counteract the perceived nihilism, value-neutrality, incapacity for assigning value and indeed frivolity of post-modernism, it has become necessary to interrogate the idea of modernity itself (Knauff 2002:13). Modernity, as Friedman notes, is more complex than 'contemporaneity' or simply being part of the current (modern) world. Nor is it the adoption of apparently modern traits and practices (Friedman, 2002:289, 291). Modernity is a complex of factors which arise at a certain historical conjuncture and inform each other, a Deleuzian assemblage (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]:52, 69 see below). Most commentators agree that modernist assemblages have also come together at other historical periods (Lyotard, cited in Sim 1999:14; Friedman, 2002:298). Friedman understands modernity to be 'a cultural space, a regime of social experience' (2002:289) and both he and Knauff refer to Trouillot whose view the latter paraphrases as 'modernity is a geography of imagination that creates progress through the projection and management of alterity' (Knauff 2002:18; Friedman 2002:289). This allows us to move beyond the simple dichotomy 'modernism/post-modernism' and admit the possibility of modernism existing side by side with, or embedded in, the pre-modern, post-modern or simply non-modern (Latour 1993). By identifying the modernist tendency in anthropology in this essay I do not wish to irretrievably label any particular contributor as falling within one or other of these camps, but to point out the limits of a mode of thought with its origins in enlightenment rationalism, which here, as a shorthand or portmanteau, is labelled modernist.

At least since Gluckman's critique of Malinowski's analysis of social change (see below) anthropology has been informed by these two traditions, the relational and the modernist. Gluckman argued for the analysis of relations between the various groups within colonial Africa as occurring within the same 'social field' or 'field of interdependence' (Gluckman 1949:6, 7, 20). His analysis of the constitution of social fields is relatively undeveloped in his essay, although it remains a productive approach, and its terminology is sometimes taken up today (e.g. Wright and Shore 1997:14). Strathern also questions whether the concept 'society' (she explicitly links her argument to the concept 'culture' also) is theoretically obsolete suggesting:

To think of society as a thing is to think of it as a discrete entity. The theoretical task then becomes one of elucidating 'the relationship' between it and other entities. This is a mathematic, if you will, that sees the world as inherently divided into units. The significant corollary of this view is that relationships appear as extrinsic to such units: they appear as secondary ways of connecting things up. (Strathern, in Ingold 1996:61).

While rejecting 'society', Strathern nevertheless wishes to retain 'sociality'. Both Gluckman and Strathern call in question Malinowski's methodology. Yet Malinowski prevailed. My concern in this paper is to uncover his lineage, question its naturalness and efficacy and contribute therefore to the reaffirmation of the line of thought that leads from Gluckman to Strathern. Henrietta Moore's reference to the nation-state in the quote above is useful, since it is also my contention in this paper that the modernist concept of nation and the birth of structural anthropology went hand in hand. This is the explicit conclusion of Gellner who shows how Malinowski was influenced in his formative years in Krakow by nationalist ideologies and methodologies (Gellner 1998). More will be said on this below. Here I intend only to foreshadow that it is Malinowski's concept of intercultural that will be questioned, since it is an exemplar for a widespread view that is extremely influential.

The paper, then, questions modernist and structural approaches to the imagining of a culture as 'autonomous entity' by looking at this approach's historical origins in early 20th century nationalism, its explanatory power, and logical conclusions or extensions. One of these extensions is the need to conceptualise an intercultural space and the anomalies this conceptualisation produces. At the conclusion of the paper I discuss the invention of a nationalism for the Aboriginal people of the Broome region as an inevitable consequence of the conjuncture of state processes and modernist anthropology.

THE CULTURE

The modernist approaches I am concerned with here derive their shared assumption, that social life appears as a result of structuring principles, from a common base in late 19th Century scientism. The same era which, not coincidentally, gave rise to ethnic nationalism (see e.g. Anderson 1991 [1983]; Geary 2003). It is not germane to the limited purposes of this essay that there are strong ideological differences between, for instance, British social anthropology (see especially Malinowski 1958 [1945]:41–51), Althusserian Marxism (Althusser and Balibar 1970) and Bourdieu's 'habitus' concept as part of a theory of practice (Bourdieu 1977). At the level of generality used here they share common assumptions. These could be called a common commitment to relatively hermetic auto-reproduction that is antithetical to relational anthropology. This is expressed by Malinowski in a formulation so often rephrased by others as to now seem self-evident:

Culture appears as a vast conditioning apparatus which, through training, the imparting of skills, the teaching of norms, and the development of tastes, amalgamates nurture with nature, and produces beings whose behaviour cannot be determined by the study of anatomy and physiology alone ... man never deals with his difficulties alone. He organises into families; he lives in a community with a tribal constitution, where principles of authority, of leadership, of hierarchy are defined by a cultural charter (Malinowski 1945:43).

Structuralism is only a late and extreme form of modernist thought. Castoriadis, the Marxist social philosopher and psychoanalyst, was very early in his rejection of the Stalinist tendencies of structuralism, yet he echoes a similar view to Malinowski's:

The institution of society in this general sense is of course made out of various particular institutions. And these institutions function as and form a coherent whole. Even in situations of crisis, in the most violent state of internal strife and internal war, a society is still this one society; if it were not, there would not and could not be struggle over the same, or common, objects. There is thus a unity of the total institution of society; and, upon further examination, we find that this unity is in the last resort the unity and internal cohesion of the immensely complex

web of meanings that permeate, orient, and direct the whole life of the society considered, as well as the concrete individuals that bodily constitute society. (Castoriadis 1997:7)

Despite the certainty of Castoriadis' tone in this passage, it is really not true. French society, for example, of which Castoriadis himself is a part (fleeing Greece at the start of WWII), is riven with linguistic, regional, historical and ideological differences that make it considerably more problematic to characterise as 'this one society' than he allows. On the one hand he suggests society is constituted by its institutions, on the other by the 'complex web of meanings' that allows for struggle. The first of these characterisations is the familiar modernist approach; the second tells us little more than that 'society is constituted by those processes which constitute society'.

The shortcomings of the modernist approach for an understanding of the operation of culture are several, even putting aside the necessity to conjure up an intercultural space. This structured/structuring view of social interaction has developed from a particular historical conjuncture into a mode of thought that permeates many critical institutions of modern states, not least the law, where it currently informs and influences native title cases in Australia (which I discuss at the conclusion of this paper). It accounts for much of the stalemate in progress towards minority rights, of which Indigenous rights is a particular branch. It is not redundant to canvass the frustrations that modernist structuralist conceptions engender, even though the critique has been under way for some time.

Firstly, they are not very good at telling us about internal differentiations within supposed cultures, which are potentially infinite, since they are dynamically created and transformed in constant dialogue. As Weiner (2002) points out, there can be no ontological distinction between differences within 'cultures' and differences between them, thus breaking down the idea of cultures as bounded. He goes on to suggest that the task of anthropology is to analyse the construction of difference itself. Further to this I would suggest there needs to be attention to the ways that construction of difference, a continuous human activity, hardens into the need for conflict over difference that is seemingly intractable because it appears to arise from an essentialised positional identity.

To take one example of difference generation, Henrietta Moore exhaustively examines the distinction between sexed bodies and genders. In her conclusion, which also applies to the approaches discussed here, she says:

The main intellectual issue is how to reconcile theories that prefer unconscious desire to wilful choice, the unchanging structures of linguistic difference to discursive playfulness, the register of the symbolic to that of the social? The answer is not to give up on the sex/gender debate, not to try to define absolutely the boundary between sex and gender or that between sexuality and gender or between sex and sexuality. The boundary between sex and gender may be unstable, but that does not mean that they can be collapsed into each other... In a sense we need to manage the sex/gender debate as we live our lives, that is as a complex relation between a radical materialism and a radical social constructionism (Moore 1999:168-9).

Moore's distinctions are quite clearly part of a localised political debate in which differential rights are negotiated. Structuralist approaches would have us believe that internal differentiations within a culture are somehow a product of its internal logic. They are therefore neither capable of examination from the point of view of internal political struggles, except inasmuch as these are aberrant, asocial or denying the march of history. Nor can internal differentiation be assessed by the application of external values. In this sense structural approaches are irredeemably relativist. Yet, the operation of politics necessarily requires

variability in power relations over time and context, and implies realignments that question the stability of the site of struggle itself. The difficulty for theory is to find the ground between approaches that imply that nothing is possible, and the equally unsatisfactory, those that imply if anything is possible then everything is possible. The relational theoretical stance circumvents this unproductive dualism of determinism versus voluntarism.

Hermetic views of culture cannot tell us much about transitions either, except in an unsatisfactory linear series of 'passages'. While it is true that 'the old enters the new with the signification given to it by the new' (Castoriadis 1997:14), it is equally the case that the new cannot begin to think except with the significations given to it by the old. The view of a culture as structured cannot cope with this embeddedness of temporality. For instance, cultural differences between members of the same socio-political configuration often arise between generations. There is typically dissent among youth which is expressed in radically differentiating cultural forms. When the youths become the elders they carry with them the fact of their youth, they partake of both. How, then, are we to deal with the observation that the elders are, at least partly, their own dissenting youth and they hold dialogue with themselves, and their youth? The dominant tradition actually tells us little at all about dissent, except to figure it as dysfunctional.

Nor is it very satisfactory when dealing with changes over time, as the discussion of Malinowski, culture change and the construction of the intercultural below will show. In the real world, things change from second to second, minute to minute, year to year along one axis, while necessarily shifting in space and geographic relations along another axis, and (using a multidimensional metaphor) along a third axis, relations between individuals and the outer world that they encounter are also changing. Add to this the collapse of time, where prior experience mingles with the present configuration and future expectations, and the subject matter of culture in any particular configuration becomes variable and complex in a way that challenges any language we bring to bear on it.

What structuralizing approaches do (indeed any attempt to analyse culture as an artefact) is to privilege certain moments of change over others such that some changes change nothing, while others are shifts, breaks, transitions or transformations. Thus we start with 'a culture' before we discover something about it. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' stands out as a sophisticated example (Bourdieu 1977). Such attempts to introduce some sort of dynamic into the structuralist conception result (as EP Thompson long ago pointed out in his criticism of Althusser (Thompson 1978)), only in rejection of the determinist image of a plodding and unlovely engine moving on to higher things, in favour of the rather more graceful image of an astrolabe, not easily predictable and capable of multitudes of permutations as it revolves around itself, but nevertheless discrete, bounded and subject to hidden laws. The constituting effect of the operation of culture into a resultant constituted and entitled 'culture' can be brought into question by starting at its limits and asking 'what happens when astrolabes collide'?

THE INTERCULTURAL

The 'astrolabe' view of societies or cultures can be traced to a particular period of history which gave birth both to ideologies of national cultures with political and territorial rights and to modern anthropology. Benedict Anderson says of this period:

theorists of nationalism have often been perplexed, not to say irritated, by these three paradoxes: 1. The objective modernity of nations to the historians eye vs their subjective antiquity in the eyes of nationalists. 2. The formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept [...] vs. the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations [...]. 3. The 'political' power of nationalisms vs. their philosophical poverty and even incoherence. In other words, unlike most other

isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers [...]. This 'emptiness' easily gives rise, among cosmopolitan and polylingual intellectuals, to a certain condescension. Like Gertrude Stein in the face of Oakland, one can rather quickly conclude that 'there is no there there' (Anderson 1991 [1983]:14).

Scepticism about nationalism, which the experience of the 20th Century inevitably leads us to, must now be matched with scepticism about some of anthropology's foundational ideas. We can gain some insight into it through two posthumous works. Gellner, one of the leading theorists of nationalism, spent his last years drafting a work that showed how both Malinowski and Wittgenstein spent their early life, before re-locating to Britain, in the ferment of nationalist emergence, the first in Krakow and the other in Vienna (Gellner 1998). In Malinowski's case it led to borrowing of methodologies that were developed for nation-building folkloric studies as the basis of his empiricist insistence on fieldwork. It produced also his understanding of cultures as somehow timeless and self-referential. In his own posthumous work, edited after his death by Phyllis Kaberry, he was concerned with cultural change, but necessarily hamstrung by the concept of changeless cultures from which he began (Malinowski 1958 [1945]). He engaged with other theorists of cultural change who wished to proceed from the 'zero point' of pre-colonial cultures and disagreed with them only in that the details of the zero point were unavailable to empirical enquiry (Malinowski 1958 [1945]:27-31). He preferred instead to begin the analysis of cultural change firmly in what is presently known, and in the context of the pressing needs of colonial administration. He developed a methodology of analysis based on the characteristics of what he sometimes called 'white' culture, sometimes 'European', ranked against African or Native culture, with in-between the incidents of cultural change. He was not unaware of diversity in European culture nor in African, however his methodology decreed that for the purposes of analysis they needed to be seen both as unitary and as implacably ranked against each other. This view survives in anthropology's privileging of the 'other' of another alien culture rather than the other within. It is perhaps partially tenable if we view the modern period as a radical disjuncture and ignore the pre-modern embedded in it. It is less tenable as the post-modern tends to unite with the pre-modern, making it even less justifiable to view the modern period as the standard in contrast to which other cultures are constituted.

In Malinowski's work on cultural change we see the origins of the ubiquitous intersecting circles used to explain in graphic form the shared space where cultures interact, though Malinowski used tables for the same purpose. Reducing cultural change to tabular form is not simply a heuristic device for him, it is a practical methodology he expects others to follow. In his first column, labelled column 'A', he suggests writing out the characteristics of European culture in a situation of culture contact. In column 'C' he places the characteristics of contemporary native culture. While in between, in column 'B' are the processes of cultural change. Characteristically, he realises these headings do not encompass all possibly relevant information and he adds several other columns, but in order to prevent the simplicity of his method from breaking down he insists on columns A, B and C as the core of analysis. Malinowski produces five columns in his 'Specimen Chart to be Used for the Analysis of Culture Contact and Change', with a liminal sixth column appearing in the editor's footnote. Columns A, B and C are described sequentially as: 'A - White influences, interests, and intentions'. It is interesting here how the cultural homogeneity of the non-African side of the equation can only be conveniently summarised using a term of race, 'white'.¹ Column B is labelled 'Processes of Culture Contact and Change', and C labelled 'Surviving forms of Tradition' (Malinowski 1958 [1945]:73). Column D, the Reconstructed Past is introduced so that the scholar can contrast tradition as it is understood today with the reconstruction of tradition as it existed in the past (Malinowski 1958 ([1945]:76) and column E, on inauthenticity, is reserved for 'New Forces of Spontaneous African Reintegration or Reac-

tion' (Malinowski 1958 [1945]:73) which is explained as 'such phenomena as African racialism, regional nationalism, and the reinterpretation of tribal patriotism' (Malinowski 1958 [1945]:76).

It is clear from his discussion that the first three columns are central and are to appear in the order prescribed by his explicit 'Rules of Method' that accompany the tables. As he says:

European evidence first; African data last; and the facts of change in between, since the last named are the result of the interaction between the two flanking columns. In field work and argument this order expresses the dynamic relation of three phases (Malinowski 1958 [1945]:75).

While he adds, that 'actually, observation and theory may start from any one of the three cultural phases' he does not mean by this to undermine their distinctiveness but to make the methodological point that the columns can be filled in somewhat randomly as information comes to hand, thus reinforcing their independence in empirical observation (Malinowski 1958 [1945]:75).

Although Malinowski's tabular approach to social change was vigorously challenged by Gluckman not long after it appeared (Gluckman, 1949 [1947]), and Gluckman's positing instead of a shared social field allowed for the development of the Manchester school of an anthropology of contemporary organisations (Wright 1994:10, 12), Malinowski's schematic of cultures and their interaction continues to inform practice both in anthropology and in broader discourse. The interaction of unique entities is the starting point from which complexity is introduced by accretion, even though before too long complexity should lead us to question the simplicity of the original formulation. This is clearly evident in my own early work, influenced by structuralist Marxism, which I introduce here as an illustration partly in order to resile from it:

One of my fundamental assumptions has been that social processes are structured, that socio-cultural systems can be analysed as structures and therefore that Aboriginal/European interaction is best conceived as the intersection of structured systems. ... The only way to retain the productive aspects of conceiving of cultural systems as if they were structures and yet to understand the dynamic within and between them, is to realise that they are not mechanically articulated, nor is one entirely embraced by the other. The points at which they intersect do not have an unambiguous status; they are functionally polyvalent allowing for a struggle over symbols and material power (Sullivan 1996:124).

This rather brave attempt to account for everything was cast in a stance against Western Australian assimilationism, in as much as it denied Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness and by this denial was effectively discriminatory. It was explicitly couched within a debate about rights to Indigenous governance on grounds of cultural distinctiveness. However, this view of the intersection of structured systems is undermined when we progress it further by interrogating the ambiguous intercultural space, a liminal space at the margin, metisised, creolised and mongrelised—Malinowski's column 'B'. It leads us to try to answer two questions that are ultimately nonsensical. Firstly, what happens in the intercultural space, and secondly how do these interactions relate to those people left out of it, still deeply mired in their 'culture'?

On the first of these we could ask: what is the nature of these beings that inhabit this intercultural space? Are they cultural elites, entrepreneurial brokers, adopting now the deep practices of their culture, now the shallow political posturing of our own? Does this, then, suggest that some more authentic but less articulate mass stands behind them? What questions of moral legitimacy does this raise, the line to be drawn between fearless leader and unrepresentative thug? Or is the whole culture capable of lurching now into our domain and

then back into its own? Further, since one or two of their number can move so comfortably between domains surely all can do so; and if so, why don't they just stay *here* with us, as many of our neo-assimilationists, Brian Barry among them, insist (Barry 2001)?

Here we come up against the question of the values that are said to constitute cultural agents and which this approach would lead us to suspect must be compromised in intercultural encounters. Values tell a people what is right and wrong, how the world works, what is lovely and, most importantly what is hateful and what to do about it. On the face of it a cultural value system is a recipe for conflict. Cultures, according to the view criticised here, are constituted by systems of authority and routine forms of behaviour legitimated and informed by a set of societal values. If the holders of these values live side by side with those who hold other values, even where these are not directly in conflict, they are in a deep sense contradictory, because, so this argument goes, the very existence of alternative values questions the profound nature of those held that explain in unquestionable fashion the nature of the world, indeed the cosmos. This seems self-evident, yet it does nothing but point to a mystery. Not only have people throughout history lived side-by-side with those holding incompatible values, without conflict, and continue to do so, in the majority of cases in mutual cooperation and accommodation. It is also true that value systems may be multiple and subject to continual reinterpretation and renewal, subtly transformed. Humans are capable of harbouring a range of beliefs within themselves that are not only incompatible, but which we usually see no need to arrange into a consistent framework. Multiple values exist intertwined, not only in the same interactions, but in the same individuals, and therefore potentially in all cultural interactions both 'internal' and 'external'. What consequences does this have for the conception of a culture driven by distinct and internally coherent values? Again, it breaks down its specificity, its uniqueness and therefore the idea that it may have ideological boundaries which require transcending as actors move into the dangerously value-compromised realm of the intercultural.

Further experience with Indigenous groups since the words quoted above were written (Sullivan 1996), leads in other ways also to the conclusion that the ambiguous space of intersection, and the polyvalent practices and institutions, do not occur in a place all of their own. They permeate both systems, fatally undermining their distinctiveness such that we can no longer use the phrase 'both systems' comfortably implying, as it does, the distinctiveness I wish to question. They permeate, also, any other system in their vicinity, such as the natural environment and its creatures, spreading out to a point where the analogy of intersecting structures becomes ridiculous and needs to be superseded.

This view is not unique. The anthropologists Gluckman and Strathern have been mentioned above. The social philosopher Deleuze is also particularly influential in doing away with the need for intercultural spaces as well as structured cultures themselves since, as Braidotti observes, Deleuze's work 'entails a total dissolution of the notion of a center and consequently of originary sites or authentic identities of any kind' (Braidotti 1994:5). Deleuze proposes replacing concepts of 'structure' with 'assemblage' since:

Structures are linked to conditions of homogeneity, but assemblages are not. The assemblage is co-functioning, it is 'sympathy', symbiosis ... It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns- different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy' (Deleuze and Parnet 1987 [1977]:52, 69).

INTERCULTURAL INTERRELATION — THE MULTICULTURE

This is not simply free floating theory devoid of attachment to the real world, an academic onanism applied post-hoc to ethnographic situations. Rather it is, in my view, the only way

to make sense of the intercultural relations experienced by anthropologists in the field. This observation arises from more than two decades of involvement with Aboriginal groups in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and can be exemplified in these concluding passages by reference to the Aboriginal people of the Broome region. Although acquainted with these people since 1983 I first professionally investigated 'traditional attachment' when preparing a report for government purchase of a smallholding for their benefit in 1989 (Sullivan 1989). Then, more intensively, in 1993–4 when reporting on the need for preservation of one of the few undeveloped areas close to the town which would have put an end to continuing local ritual (Sullivan 1994). This developed into the claim for recognition of native title that became the Rubibi case, the first stage of which was successfully determined in 2000 (Sullivan 2000). Each of these cases required demonstration of a 'traditional' culture separate and distinct from non-Indigenous culture requiring an act of translation across this boundary. The success of these cases depended to a great extent on the clear integrity, depth of feeling and complexity of local culture, but this alone was not enough. Its topography had to be abstracted from the wider social landscape in which it was embedded in order to be assimilable to the processes of governmentality that would guarantee its recognition. That is, in order for the Aboriginal people to appear as subjects to whom rights could attach. It is in the examination of this that we can see how the culture is constructed and yet how inadequate the idea of an intercultural space between cultures becomes in describing lived reality and practice.

Broome people first of all present a challenge to the conflation of race and culture (in which both anthropology and colonialism are complicit) by the fact that they are almost universally of mixed Asian/European/Aboriginal descent. The cleric, linguist and anthropologist (in that order), Ernest Worms, said of the Broome Yawuru in 1938 'their tribe has melted away immensely due to early contact with White and Asian pearl fishermen, therefore I could find only fifty real blacks among them' (Worms 1938:164). This later became abbreviated to 'the remaining fifty Yaoro' (Worms 1944:298). This term Yawuru, which describes a language, is not as simple as it looks when applied to the local people as a whole, who also speak standard English, Karajarri, Nygina, Bardi and Kriol (and the question whether Djugun is a dialect of Yawuru or a language of its own remains beyond definitive resolution (see Hosakawa 1991:2, 5)). The people hunt and fish for both sustenance and pleasure within and around Broome town, yet also hold down jobs, mainly in the welfare sector, and run commercial enterprises. Some have become wealthy, though most remain extremely impoverished by Australian standards. Most drive cars, possess televisions. They make spears and ritual artefacts. They continue initiation by circumcision on two grounds instituted since time immemorial that lie a stone's throw from the township. They also have a strong orientation towards the Catholic church. They celebrate two major Indigenous myth cycles among several once defining the area. One of these originates to the north the other to the south and both have core ritual experts who differentiate themselves one from the other while also having those members who participate in both. People express attachment to local areas in and around Broome by a variety of means (birth-spirit, birth, residence and esoteric knowledge, descent). Descent is the most common, but conforms well to no anthropological model and can best be glossed as 'blood'. For example attachment through a person's mother may derive from her father or vice versa, thus neither matrilineal, patrilineal nor strictly ambilineal. They ensure their cultural continuity by transmission of knowledge from the old people, by memory and interpretation, through consulting written sources, by exegesis and through revelation. Europeans have been inducted into ritual, classificatory kinship and assimilated by marriage. The question, then, for the topic of this essay, is where lies the realm of the intercultural in what, to some, would appear as a post-colonial mess, and where lie the boundaries of distinct cultures?

Governmentality and modernism are implicated one in the other (Foucault 2000[1978]). Put less opaquely, state processes of recognition of Aboriginal rights are only

capable of assimilating arguments couched in the terms that modernism has concocted in the colonial encounter, thus instituting the right-bearing subject. This starts with a curious contradiction, the modernist construction of the culture begins with the bracketing off of all that is contemporary. The natives must in a sense appear naked, rid of that which they share with the coloniser, and their own contemporary appropriations. This alone is not enough. They must then replicate forms of social relation observed by the earliest colonial anthropologists which, as I have argued above, assert a primordial form of association. These, not coincidentally, mimic the core of the colonial conception of its own culture and origins. Recognised rightful Broome people now appear under the aegis of the state as speakers of a single language, Yawuru, or linked by blood to such speakers. The language itself commands a defined territory and this is inscribed in a single origin myth with domiciled rituals, legitimating one ceremonial site over others. In short, 'the Yawuru' have been allocated a nationalism.² That this is done by reference to colonial anthropology steeped in nationalism should not be surprising, indeed it is an expected outcome, but a close reading of these sources reveals that they are themselves inconsistent from one period to another, across authorities, between works of a single author and even within works. Somehow the post-colonial truth is abstracted from these colonial musings, melded with native testimony, and presented, at once ancient and modern, by selected reading and argument, thus transforming intercultural interrelation from an effect that arises in social process to a domain that occurs between structured entities.

The earliest, ship-borne, explorations of the Broome region coast observed people of Asian origin so well integrated with the Aboriginal people that they formed a noticeable part of the groups assembled to repel invaders (Grey 1841:253–5). Multilingualism was common, the language that Yawuru shares most vocabulary with is Djaii, most spoken at the tip of the peninsula three or four 'language group' boundaries distant (Hosakawa 1991:9). This need not be surprising. Broome people travelled this far north and as far south gathering people for ceremonies in the Broome locale and they married across these language group lines. The last Yawuru elder and guardian of ritual, before the present holders, habitually spoke Karajarri. Before the rigid codification of Aboriginal practice instituted by Malinowski's contemporary, Radcliffe-Brown (Hiatt 1962, 1966, 1984), the earliest anthropological investigations did not classify the people by linguistic affiliation but rather used an inconsistent mixture of language terms, direction terms, and locality names while stipulating that these fell within nations (Bates 1985:39). At the level of local groups there was disagreement. Piddington, who spent an intensive period in the region said that Radcliffe-Brown's clan/horde model didn't apply (Piddington and Piddington 1932:351–2). Elkin, who spent a lot less time there, said that it did (Elkin 1933:271–281). However, his paper asserting this devotes considerably more space to description of anomalous examples (which, interestingly, reflect well current circumstances) than to the norm he was asserting (Elkin 1933:276–8). In another paper he was ambivalent about whether patrilineality was the rule or whether it was the kind of spiritual attachment that allows for multiple cross-cutting affiliations that are seen today (Elkin 1932:330–1). Others, less skilled, produced odd lists of local attachment that cannot be replicated either in the literature or oral testimony, and sometimes are widely inaccurate as to localities and inconsistent from one work to another (Bischofs 1908:33; Davidson 1938:122; Worms 1940:231, 1944:95, 295, 300, 307). Even contemporary ethnographies are inconsistent within the space of a few pages (Hosakawa 1991:xxi, 2, 4, 5), because as Bischofs said in 1908 'even the blacks themselves are not very consistent in using all these different terms' (Bischofs 1908:33). A sentiment echoed by Hosakawa, who tells us some eight decades later 'there is a highly complicated context of local politics, in which various groups of Aborigines are trying to secure their rights as resident Aborigines in the land which Yawuru (and Jukun) people used to occupy' (Hosakawa 1991:13). Bates, on the other hand, whose work is often discredited by modernist anthropologists, resisted Radcliffe-Brownian orthodoxy and insisted 'the natives said

so or said it in this order and therefore it must be right' (Bates 1985:72). An alternate reading of the sources is therefore possible and potentially explanatory. It is one that would describe sociality and social fields rather than a clan based linguistically bounded society, yet it is one that will not, perhaps cannot, be heard by the processes of Australian governmentality (Edmond 2004).

The challenge for contemporary relational ethnography is to make itself relevant to public policy. It is an urgent challenge because the groups instituted by colonial modernity are required to incorporate under statute and thus ossify their previously fluid and contestable relations in ways that can only produce post-colonial conflict, dissension and ongoing intercultural dislocation. It is a challenge that cannot be met through the courts, which are antithetical to this form of interpretation. It has begun with several discrete ethnographies (e.g. Correy 2004; Merlan 1998; Povinelli 1993) and continues with the papers in this volume. Yet it not only requires these countervailing alternative ethnographies, but also an explicit engagement with the formulation of policy itself. Wright and Shore's proposal for the anthropology of policy as both a 'field' in itself and the investigation of how social fields become subjects brought into being by relations of power in particular formations of governmentality, is encouraging (Wright and Shore 1997). Breaking down the hard boundaries of constituted Indigenous cultures and questioning the anomalous intercultural spaces that occur between them and non-Indigenous peoples is threatening both to entrenched Indigenous and to governmental interests. Yet it need not be. Seeing interactions among Indigenous people as occurring within social fields of interrelation among themselves and with non-Indigenous people is a threat neither to culture nor to rights. It offers, on the contrary, more congenial ways of conceiving how these may be pursued in all their complexity, rather than circumscribed, re-described and ultimately contained and reduced.

NOTES

1. It is not Malinowski's intention, but the conflation of race, something biologically given and inescapable, and culture, similarly binding, and their common ground with theories of species produced through the period of scientific imagination would bear considerable analysis.
2. This is the case at the time of writing following determination of WG 90 & 91/1998. Evidence has concluded but a determination has not yet been made in the wider Broome region case (WG 6006/98). The author is not involved in the wider application.

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