

The Challenge of Indigenous Peoples

Spectacle or Politics?



Edited by Barbara Glowczewski & Rosita Henry

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 THE
BARDWELL
PRESS

English edition published in 2011 by The Bardwell Press

Adapted and translated from *Le défi indigène: entre spectacle et politique*, originally published by Éditions Aux Lieux d'Être, 2007.

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Ouvrage publié avec le concours du Ministère français chargé de la culture—
Centre national du livre.

Published with the support of the French Ministry of Culture—Centre national
du livre.

Cover photograph: Borroloola women, dressed for their performance of the
aeroplane dance, Yanyuwa, Garrwa, Mara and Kurdanji, by Anke Tonnaer, 2001.

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Published by:

The Bardwell Press

Tithe Barn House, 11 High Street,

Cumnor, Oxford, OX2 9PE, UK

www.bardwell-press.co.uk

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-905622-26-9

Typeset by The Bardwell Press, Oxford, UK

Printed in Great Britain

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Acknowledgements

We wish to express our deep gratitude to Marcia Langton, Foundation Chair of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne, who co coordinated with us the “Indigenous Strategies of Communication: Festivals and New Technologies” programme. This research programme provided the framework for a number of exceptionally fruitful meetings and conversations from which this book was born.

We acknowledge the Academy of Social Sciences and the French Embassy in Australia for the financial support that facilitated the participation in the programme of the early career researchers who have contributed to this book. As members of the research programme, these researchers were enrolled in conjoint doctoral degrees, between the Laboratoire d’Anthropologie Sociale (LAS) and the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) and the University of Melbourne (Jessica De Largy Healy and Arnaud Morvan), the University of Queensland (Géraldine Le Roux) and James Cook University (Martin Préaud). We thank these institutions for their support in funding their research and in providing the lively intellectual environments that fostered our debates.

We sincerely thank all the authors who have contributed chapters to this book and acknowledge their patience and help in preparing and updating their own works, some which were originally written in French and others in English, as well as other aspects of the volume. In particular, we owe special thanks to Arnaud Morvan and Rafaela Henry who compiled

the original bibliography and Dominique Samson Normand de Chambourg who compiled the updated English one. We take the opportunity here to congratulate the contributors who wrote their chapters while still doctoral students but who, since the publication of the French edition in 2007, have had outstanding success in completion of their theses and have had their doctoral degrees conferred (Jessica De Lary Healy, Martin Préaud, Géraldine Le Roux, Arnaud Morvan and Anke Tonnaer).

We offer our heartfelt gratitude to Estelle Castro, Lise Garond and Pierre Brochet for their early commentaries and to Stéphane Le Queux, Veronique Cohen-Tanuggi, Eva Toulouze, Marie Thérèse Weals and Kylie Rawson for their invaluable suggestions for the translation of some complex conceptual arguments. We also thank Anke Tonnaer for the use of her wonderful photograph for the cover of this book and especially the Borrooloola women who are featured in the photograph, dressed for their performance of the aeroplane dance (Chapter 4).

Special thanks go to Julien Ténédos our editor for the French version of the book published by Aux Lieux d'Être, a French publishing house that created an outstanding catalogue in the social sciences within three short years, but was forced—shortly after our book sold out—to close, like many other small publishers threatened by the economic crisis.

Recognition and thanks are also due to the Centre National du Livre in France, for the translation grant and Peter Hamilton, translator, and Toby Matthews, editor, from Bardwell Press. Without their hard work and commitment, this English edition of our book would not have been possible.

Last but not least we wish to particularly express our warm appreciation to Joe Neparrnga Gumbula and all the Indigenous women and men we have met on our respective pathways for the way they continue to challenge the human spirit.

Preface

This collection is significant in that it features the work of eight early career researchers who have developed deep understandings of the performative dimensions of human intercultural engagement through long-term ethnographic fieldwork. Their work and the analyses of the other contributors to the book provide historical and anthropological insights that are invaluable for understanding the current complexity of local situations across the world. Since this book was first published in France in 2007, important events in Indigenous transnational politics have confirmed the trends highlighted by the authors, as noted by Barbara Glowczewski in her updated version of the first chapter. Chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 14 were written by members of the collaborative France–Australia “Strategies of Indigenous Communication: Cultural Festivals and New Technologies” programme. The programme leaders, Barbara Glowczewski (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), France), Marcia Langton (University of Melbourne) and Rosita Henry (James Cook University (JCU)), convened a colloquium in July 2004 at the JCU campus in Cairns, Australia, at which we began to collectively explore the relationship between artistic expression and political action. A further avenue for the productive sharing of ideas was provided by Barbara Glowczewski’s seminars on the “Anthropology of Networks” held over a period of four years at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris (Chapters 12 and 13). In July 2005, we jointly convened a panel entitled “Festivals and strategies of communication: cultural singularities in a dynamic network” at the 6th European

Society for Oceanists Conference, organised by the Centre de Recherches et de Documentation de l'Océanie (CREDO) in Marseilles (Chapters 4, 9, 10, 11). Thus, the chapters in this book were developed from presentations delivered in several different seminar contexts where we questioned, among other issues, the idea of indigeneity as fixed essence by exploring different performative contexts in which Indigenous rights have been brought into the limelight.

Our collective aim is to bring into focus hotly contested contemporary debates regarding essentialism (of blood, soil, faith or culture) and their negative impacts in a context of globalisation and the concomitant rise of fundamentalisms. We highlight Indigenous Australian experiences as a framework for understanding how peoples in other cultural contexts respond to globalisation (as both discourse and practice) and the apparently contradictory, but actually complementary, increasing fortification of nation-state boundaries around the world. Globalising forces may work to encompass difference but, in their very encompassment, differences are regenerated and nationalisms are able to flourish anew. The cultural responses and strategies employed by Indigenous Australians, Pacific Islanders and other peoples, such as the Adivasi of India or the Khanty of Siberia, are based on concepts of human sociality that challenge social science analyses as well as taken-for-granted popular ideas concerning the nature and impact of globalisation.

*Rosita Henry
& Barbara Glowczewski
March 2011*