People on Country: Vital Landscapes, Indigenous Futures

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In the conclusion Gillespie argues against setting up dichotomies of the ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ in music (211) and, indeed, in this book she made clear that the creativity of new songs is inspired by traditional songs. The Papua New Guinea Highlands is an ideal region to study transformation in music and the author presents her findings in a well-written and clear text with much documentation and detailed analysis—a very good publication with new insight into the ongoing discussions of influences and changes in music due to cultural encounters.

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People on Country: Vital Landscapes, Indigenous Futures
J. ALTMAN AND S. KERINS (Eds)

Encompassing a variety of ownership rights and regimes, the Indigenous estate now covers more than 20 per cent of the Australian landmass and includes areas of considerable cultural, ecological and biodiversity value. Indigenous Australians lived upon and managed Australian landscapes for millennia prior to the arrival of Europeans, but the lands that have been formally returned to the Indigenous estate following colonisation are not in the condition they once were. People on Country describes a major collaboration project which engaged with this situation. Funded by philanthropic interests, it brought together university researchers based at the Australian National University and Indigenous Australian land managers living predominantly in the Northern Territory as well as at a key location in regional New South Wales. The individual sub-projects were designed to meet local research needs as well as address broader questions relating to critical contemporary issues of biodiversity, climate change, resource depletion and Indigenous disadvantage. The authors highlight the ongoing actions of Indigenous peoples to conserve, manage and improve their lands and argue that such actions require much greater recognition and support than they currently receive.

The book is divided into two parts (identified as ‘Researcher Perspectives’ and ‘Partner Perspectives’ respectively) bracketed by introductory and concluding essays by one of the editors (Altman). In the introduction, Altman describes the genesis of the project, provides a perspective on the history, development and formal state recognition of Indigenous land management oriented to the Northern Territory and challenges readers to think critically and carefully about alternative possibilities for development on Indigenous lands. Kerins provides further regional historical context in the next chapter, documenting (partly from personal experience) a series of discursive, ideological and policy moves which have transformed the Indigenous-
generated and directed ‘Caring for Country’ projects enabled by the Northern Land Council in the 1990s and 2000s to the more centralised, state-controlled and audited ‘Working on Country’ programs of more recent times. Readers aware of developments in this area prior to the 1990s and/or focused on contexts other than the Northern Territory may feel the absence of material from those times and places, but the accounts provide useful grounding for the case studies which follow, and will no doubt be an effective resource when a wider history of the state and public recognition of Indigenous land management across Australia is written.

The researcher case studies respectively emphasise ‘two-way’ ecological research incorporating Indigenous and scientific knowledge (Ens), the (in)visibility of the customary economy and its ongoing significance (Buchanan and May), the role of land management in education (Fogarty) and the existence of formalised Indigenous land management in places other than northern and remote Australia, in this case rural New South Wales (Hunt). The ‘Partner Perspectives’ are a diverse set of multi-authored responses to five questions: the history of the group; the environmental and social benefits of land management activity; the factors influencing success; the costs and barriers; and visions for the future. Non-Indigenous authors and/or facilitators were involved in the production of each of these partner essays which nevertheless give Indigenous land managers collaborating in the People on Country projects the opportunity to speak about matters of importance to them. That the Indigenous collaborators were given real freedom in how to respond is evident in the varied range and content of the resulting accounts, and this speaks to one key challenge the book poses both to itself and to the wider readership it addresses: how to adequately account for local needs, interests and aspirations within a broader generalised system of support and accountability for Indigenous land management? Success in meeting that challenge is partly a matter of perspective—those looking for smooth and seamless transitions, straightforward comparisons and complementarities and/or universally generalisable propositions will be disappointed by elements of this book. Those looking for insights into the diversity and significance of contemporary Indigenous land management (and its collaborators), new ideas and theoretical framings and policy suggestions about how to enhance such activity will find what they are looking for.

In the concluding essay, Altman provides additional synthesis and revisits the origins of the contemporary situation to argue for the significance of the Indigenous estate, its people and the conservation work that must form a crucial element of a sustainable future. In this vision, Indigenous people are not only maintaining environmental and cultural values in line with their own aspirations, but also deriving appropriate recompense for ecological service provision which demonstrably benefits adjoining landowners and communities as well as the wider Australian population. As Altman notes, this vision requires a mixture of optimism and realism—the book depicts successes amongst contemporary Indigenous land management organisations at the same time as highlighting major barriers, obstacles and frustrations which continue to constrain further success. Such a future scenario
requires a range of prerequisites: respect for Indigenous rights and knowledges; appropriate policies and governance structures; and sufficient resourcing for education, capacity building and ongoing implementation. The authors coalesce their insights into seven broad policy recommendations which address these areas and form part of a wider appendix of resources entitled ‘Engaging the State’. It is in this combination of commitment to local collaboration and diversity, pragmatic policy engagement and broader thinking about sustainable Indigenous futures that the real value of People on Country lies.

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Gods, Ghosts and Gangsters: Ritual Violence, Martial Arts and Masculinity on the Margins of Chinese Society
AVRON BORETZ
Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2010

Numerous books on Chinese popular religion have similar titles that include the common research symbols of gods and ghosts. This monograph is appealing because it adds a third dimension: gangsters. As the author Avron Boretz writes, little research in China has explored the deep and complicated relationship between popular religion and martial arts. Even rarer is research into the subtle emotional dramas in masculinity and father-son relationships, and a focus on a world of underclass, secret society and marginalised youth. This marginal society constitutes a prototype, an inspiration and a nexus of popular culture.

The ethnography in the book has gone beyond a single exclusive project; it draws on a long-term academic and fieldwork adventure. The data was mainly collected between 1988 and 2005 at two sites: Taidong in Taiwan and Dali in mainland China. The focus is on rituals and activities displaying public male bravado. Boretz’s juxtaposition of religious devotion, symbolic violence and masculinity in growing up is not a superficial analysis motivated by glamour and faerie, but a true reflection of the daily life of the youth. Popular customs such as lion dancing are embedded with both martial arts technical training and communal religious practices. The martial arts appear in the aggressive thrashing of mediums possessed by demonic spirits, and martial prowess has been linked to the moral ideal and the supernatural abilities and fantastic magic powers of Buddhist adepts and Daoist immortals. The juncture of popular religion and martial arts is interpreted by the author as a bodily practice of masculinity.

For centuries, two complementary yet competing representations of ideal masculinity have dominated Chinese popular culture: the ‘amorous scholar’ and