

The Evolution of Simplicity

NORMAN YOFFEE

*Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan,
Ann Arbor, Mich. 48109-1382, U.S.A. (nyoffee@
umich.edu). 17 IV 01*

*Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to
Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* By
James C. Scott. New Haven: Yale University Press,
1998. 445 pp.

"Dear Norm" (wrote the editor of CA), "I see several reasons for inviting an archaeologist, and more specifically you, to review this book. Scott addresses some basic questions about the relations of state to local populations, economic activities, and related matters such as record-keeping, systems of naming and measurement, etc. His claims extend quite broadly to states in general, but the examples that he draws from are from the last few centuries, rather than the longer record of states. Moreover, much of the evidence that he cites has to do with buildings, roads, field patterns, etc.—topics that archaeologists research as well. So it seems to me that an archaeologist familiar with early states could see whether Scott's arguments apply to [them]. . . . This book, by a major social scientist, . . . could either have yet another review by a sociocultural anthropologist, or one of the very few reviews by an archaeologist."

"Dear Ben" (I replied), "I'll try to do the book justice, which will be challenging." Little did I know.

Modern states, according to Scott, attempt "to make a society legible," that is, to take ineffably complex and "illegible" local social practices and to create a standard grid so that leaders and bureaucrats can record, monitor, and control them. "Legibility" is effected by the state, which mandates the formation of permanent last names, standardization of weights and measures, implementation of cadastral surveys, uniformity in legal discourse, and, not least, the promotion of a single official language. The environment is similarly rationalized and simplified by planners, engineers, and architects who implement a "high-modernist ideology" of scientific and technological progress for a utopian goal.

Scott exemplifies this ideology by showing historically how states transformed forests from nature to natural resource, reducing a complex of habitats for the sake of economic productivity. This was accomplished by minimizing the diversity of species, creating straight rows in large tracts, eliminating weeds and varmints, and in

general facilitating the management of forests so that principles of commercial extraction could be inscribed and taught. The creation of monocultural forests, however, failed to recognize the symbiotic relation among soils, fungi, insects, and so forth, that made the forest resistant to fire and disease. The death of many forests from soil depletion and epidemics was the result of the abstract logic imposed to make forests governable.

High-modernist ideology was born in the late Renaissance and Enlightenment and intended to improve the human condition. The ability to transform the social and natural orders, however, had to wait until the 20th century, when modern states acquired the power to set pervasive, industrialized planning projects in motion for the benefit of civil societies that were powerless to resist them. One villain in the narrative is Le Corbusier, whose megaprojects of building and transforming cities were designed to eliminate waste, inefficiency, and disarray. Brasília is discussed as the result of such ideas of scientific urban planning and judged an "inhuman" city in which activities are functionally segregated and pedestrians are eliminated. Jane Jacobs is the corresponding hero, campaigning against purely visual order and for cities of many mixed-use neighborhoods and lively social interaction.

Lenin is the Le Corbusier of politics, and high-modernist views were designed by the vanguard party to institute the technical rationality of modern production, to train and discipline millions of workers, and to transform society into a smoothly humming machine. The models of Taylor and Ford in the West were explicitly drawn upon by Soviet social engineers for application to large-scale agriculture. Collectivization was implemented by bureaucrats and ignored the local knowledge of farmers. It was also intended to disempower local power elites by creating a peasantry dependent on the state for combines, tractors, fertilizers, and seeds. Collectivization—the appropriation and centralization of control—was a failure, producing worse yields than before the revolution.

In Tanzania in the early 1970s, Nyerere carried out a policy of "villagization," which settled pastoralists and brought in schools, clinics, and clean water with the goal of improving rural life and encouraging socialist cooperation. Modern scientific agricultural techniques, however, mainly ignored actual topographic conditions, village sites were chosen from blanks on a map, and local knowledge about polycropping was, again, ignored. Attempts to regiment the peasantry economically and politically failed. The traditional organization of agriculture and settlement that was the jointly created, partly intended product of many people over generations was disrupted by formal rules in ways that the planners couldn't possibly understand.

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These high-modernist schemes, which simplified society and environment in order to apprehend and regulate them, were unable to recognize or incorporate ways of knowing created outside their paradigm. Standardizing agriculture in order to maximize productivity, for example, by selecting crops whose architecture was compatible with mechanization, often reaped unintended consequences of such simplification. Monocropping (the word itself now practically a pejorative [Smiley 1995: 341]) and genetic uniformity regularly led to epidemics and infestations, while diversity is the enemy of diseases. Large-scale employment of commercial fertilizers, periodic applications of pesticides, and the mechanization of field preparation and harvesting led to the possibility of failure where none had existed before. The power and prestige of science and industrial technology led to visions of unparalleled agricultural productivity, but the concomitant contempt for practices of actual cultivators and what might be learned from them had tragic consequences.

Although Scott sees modern states, Western as well as Eastern, in the First as well as in the Third World as hubristic, desiring to improve the human condition but lacking confidence in the ability of humans not versed in the laws of progress and scientific truth to lead productive, modern lives, there are other possible readings of his argument (which I have admittedly bowdlerized and simplified and in any case have no special competence to assess). If the main problem with high-modernist ideology is that it is bad science or abstract, laboratory science, might one not call for better science, more engaged science, more informed planners? Don't large agricultural projects now employ anthropologists precisely to help build local knowledge into development schemes? In *Smallholders, Householders*. Robert Netting (1993) considers a variety of smallholder "alternatives" to industrialized, mechanical, specialized commodity-producing, high-modernist agricultural schemes. Through many varied examples, Netting provides, it seems to me, the necessary anthropological sequel to Scott's long prologue by showing many successful smallholder adaptations to the global economy.

At the outset of the book, Scott notes (p. 2) that "the premodern state was, in many crucial respects, partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholders and yields, their location, their very identity. It lacked anything like a detailed 'map' of its terrain and its people, a measure, metric, that would allow it to 'translate' what it knew into a common standard necessary for a synoptic view. As a result, its interventions were often crude and self-defeating." Although ancient states were certainly different from modern, 20th-century ones, no less than modern ones they tried to refashion and simplify social arrangements and make them "legible." Indeed, the term "legibility" has considerable meaning in this context, because the first writing systems appeared in conjunction with the development of many (but not all) of the first states. In Mesopotamia (and I shall limit my remarks about early states to Mesopotamia in this review) the first written

texts occur in the city of Uruk and date to about 3200 B.C., the time of the first clearly urban formation in Mesopotamia. Whereas the large majority of the first texts are records of accounts of goods, some of the first texts were lists of people and things, the best-known of which is the list of professions (Nissen, Damerow, and Englund 1990, Englund 1998). These lists were products of scribal training and have been reconstructed from many fragments of clay tablets that were schoolboy exercises. One might say that writing was invented so that there could be schools. Of course, it seems unlikely that the idea of systematizing the universe began with the first writing, but it is the case that the first writing became part of a tradition that was reproduced and commented upon (in scribal schools) over the next 2,500 years (Civil et al. 1969, Civil 1995). The language of the first texts, Sumerian, itself became standardized as it was increasingly employed for all manner of inscriptions throughout the 3d millennium B.C. Sumerian was used by many people whose spoken language was not Sumerian, and even for those who did speak a form of Sumerian as their mother-tongue it was an artificial, written language (Michalowski 1993, n.d.). One of the first goals of the first Mesopotamian states was to make their societies "legible" through the invention of writing.

For many archeologists (and just about all sociocultural anthropologists), the social evolutionary project has fallen into disrepair. Questions asked over the past four decades such as "What sort of society was it?"—in which the answers were limited to bands, tribes, chiefdoms, or states or some variation on those terms—have yielded disappointing results (Yoffee 1993) and have not advanced research into how societies emerge as changing alignments of social groups, segments, and classes, how groups exploit the ambiguities of inherited forms, giving them new evaluations, or borrow other forms, and how people create new forms in response to changed circumstances (after Wolf 1982:357). Some archaeologists, tiring of the debates over whether certain societies were chiefdoms or states (or even of defining those terms), have proposed the category "complex society" to include societies that were clearly socially and economically differentiated and stratified and that might be states, stand on the precipice of statehood, or, for some reason, be reluctant to advance to that high status. From reading Scott, however, I might propose that what occurs in these "complex societies" is a tendency toward standardization, legibility, and simplification.

In Mesopotamia at the onset of the first states we observe not only the invention and progressive standardization of an official written language but new uniformities in the material culture assemblage, notably the beveled-rim bowls that are ubiquitous in Late Uruk-period sites. These pots are most plausibly considered ration bowls (Pollock 1999:94–95), in which grains were distributed by officials of temple and/or palace estates to dependent workers. Further standardizations of the calendric system and weights and measures (Powell 1989–90, 1997) ensued. There were also trends toward unifying legal discourse (Roth 1995) and managing and

regularizing irrigation and field systems (Postgate and Powell 1988, 1990; Potts 1997). The powers of ancient Mesopotamian states were, however, limited. For example, the large irrigation systems that led to salinization in southern Iraq were built only in the Parthian-Sasanian and early Islamic periods of the 1st millennium A.D. (Adams 1981, Powell 1985).

As Scott has suspected, of course, Mesopotamian states, like other early states, were never able to control all aspects of production, consumption, and exchange—in spite of claims of rulers to be all-powerful leaders of governments. Indeed, there are plenty of data showing that local organizations of authority—councils, assemblies, elders—made many kinds of legal decisions, sometimes at variance with the literary expressions of justice depicted in law codes (Dombradi 1996, Fortner 1996, Yoffee 2000). One major difference between the earliest states and the modern states Scott describes is simply their scale. Mesopotamia was a land of city-states, and this describes the condition of many if not most of the earliest states, with the biggest exception being ancient Egypt (Yoffee 1997, Hansen 2000). The uniformity in material culture and the standardizations of language, systems of measurement, and belief systems are striking in the early states precisely because they were not imposed by any political authority. Rather, they were logical developments of deep prehistoric interactions through which commonalities were invented, maintained, and reproduced in the absence of any central political institution. Political arenas were therefore much smaller than the cultural spheres in which a number of them could and did coexist. But for this process Scott provides little guidance; there is a pressing need for social evolutionary theory, as investigated by archaeologists, to explain the emergence of the idea of the state—why there should be a new set of meanings about social, political, and economic relations and events and specifically about who has power and how power can be got and expressed. Scott has been quite helpful enough in showing how states engineer simplicity.

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Egalitarianism and Group Selection in Human Evolution

PETER J. FASHING

*Department of Anthropology, Columbia University,
New York, N.Y. 10027, U.S.A. (pjf8@columbia.edu). 27*

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Hierarchy in the Forest. By Christopher Boehm.
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999. 292 pp.

At a time when cultural and biological anthropology are drifting ever farther apart, Christopher Boehm is one of the few anthropologists attempting to bring practitioners of these two mutually wary disciplines back closer together. A cultural anthropologist by training, Boehm has also conducted fieldwork on the world-famous chimpanzees at Gombe, Tanzania. In his new book, *Hierarchy in the Forest*, he draws from his experiences in both disciplines to construct a model for the evolution of egalitarian behavior in humans. This model is sure to engender controversy because it includes a passionate argument that group selection has played an important role in the evolution of altruistic behavior in humans. As a biological anthropologist who studies the behavioral ecology of nonhuman primates, I appreciate Boehm's evolutionary approach to the investigation of human egalitarian behavior, though I feel that at times his methods lack rigor and find his arguments not always convincing.

In this book Boehm borrows heavily from his earlier scholarly writings, attempting to integrate them into a cohesive model for explaining human egalitarian behavior. He reviews a large selection of human ethnographies and several major studies of African great apes (especially chimpanzees) for evidence of egalitarianism and/or hierarchies and how they are maintained. He notes that both African great apes and humans living in complex societies form dominance hierarchies but that mobile hunter-gatherers adopt an egalitarian lifestyle in which there is little or no difference in political power between individuals. This phenomenon is perplexing because it suggests that political hierarchy followed a U-shaped trajectory during human evolution (Knauff 1991): from a hierarchical common ancestor with the African great apes through an egalitarian hunter-gatherer stage to the hierarchies represented by chiefdoms and other more complex civilizations.

Boehm's explanation for this trajectory is intriguing. He proposes that the increases in cognitive complexity that occurred as humans evolved made it possible for small bands of early human foragers to begin acting as a "moral community" preventing any one individual from attaining too much power or influence within the band. Through a variety of collective practices still discernible in extant hunter-gatherers, such as ridicule, ostracism, and even capital punishment, these early humans were able to curb any upstarts attempting to usurp

power. The result was an egalitarian society with what Boehm refers to as a "reverse dominance hierarchy" in which the politically united rank-and-file majority decisively dominated individuals (usually males) who exhibited assertive, status-striving behaviors. Occasionally, however, upstarts were successful in becoming dominant alpha-males, and when these dominant individuals passed on power to others at the end of their lives, orthodox hierarchies became established. These reversions to orthodox hierarchy became particularly common as foragers became sedentary and formed larger groups, paving the way for chiefdoms and other complex societies.

Boehm also contends that the high rates of altruism in humans that he believes were made possible by the advent of the egalitarian ethos cannot be accounted for by traditional sociobiological explanations. Contrary to the contention of most biologists that human altruism results from a mix of reciprocal altruism, kin selection, self-aggrandizement, and third-party coercion (Trivers 1971, Alexander 1987), Boehm opines that it can be more realistically explained by the evolution of a gene (or suite of genes) for altruism through group selection. He believes that the consensus-seeking behavior and collective curbing of upstarts characteristic of early egalitarian societies led to a decrease in phenotypic variation among individuals within hunter-gatherer bands. At the same time, different bands made different migratory and emergency decisions (particularly from 128,000 to 78,000 years ago, when there were many severe changes in climate) with varying degrees of success. Because these decisions were directly responsible for whether an entire band survived or perished, variation in the success rates of these collective decisions would have resulted in differential rates of survival and reproduction among bands. Boehm envisages this situation of reduced within-group variation and increased between-group variation as a circumstance in which group selection could have had powerful effects in fixing a gene for altruistic behavior in humans.

Hierarchy in the Forest is an important book both because it presents a stimulating model for the evolution of egalitarianism in humans and because it boldly brings the debate over the importance of group selection into anthropology. Boehm's model appears plausible, though the evidence he offers in support of it is often limited. Much of this evidence comes from ethnographies on modern foragers and tribesmen and often consists of isolated anecdotes or oral traditions. While these anecdotes provide interesting examples of the ways egalitarian foragers and tribesmen make group decisions and curb upstarts, they are hardly the equal of quantitative data, which are understandably absent from the literature. Boehm's nonhuman-primate evidence is equally limited, and here the lack of quantitative data is less excusable. Surprisingly, the only results he discusses from his 16 months of research on political behavior in chimpanzees at Gombe are anecdotal. His failure to attempt even preliminary quantitative evaluations of the predictions

made by his model will be frustrating for some biologically oriented readers.

I also found myself wondering whether these hunter-gatherer and tribal societies might be politically egalitarian but reproductively rather despotic. Boehm hardly considers the possibility that while being a headman or a skilled hunter may not enhance one's political power in an egalitarian society, females may mate preferentially (overtly, covertly, or both) with men in these positions (e.g., Kaplan and Hill 1985). Considering the frequency of male homicides over women in foraging societies, there is little doubt that males are competing over access to females in these societies. As a result, individual variation in reproductive success among males might be much greater within bands than Boehm suspects, a result that would weaken his group-selection argument.

Although Boehm's case for group selection in humans is clearly stated and seductive, I am still skeptical as to how important group selection is relative to the clearly more powerful individual selection. Boehm claims that reciprocal altruism requires "exact reciprocation," but this is a misinterpretation of the biological literature. An altruistic act need not be reciprocated in the same currency or soon after it is proffered, particularly in a species with cognitive abilities as powerful as those of humans. Altruism does appear to occur more often in humans than in other social mammals, but—pending the gathering of more data—it seems to me that it can be explained by reciprocal altruism, nepotism, and the other processes traditionally invoked. Without quantitative evidence or even mathematical models to attest to the relative importance of group selection, Boehm is left trumpeting a plausible hypothesis for which there is as yet no concrete empirical support.

Hierarchy in the Forest will be of particular interest to political anthropologists and paleoanthropologists, though anyone with an interest in how human nature can influence culture will find this book stimulating. Among primatologists, only those with a keen interest in primate politics or primate models for human evolution are likely to find it worth reading. One cannot fail to be impressed with the scope of this book. Either it will be highly influential in bridging the gap between cultural and biological approaches to anthropology or it will be ignored as these two disciplines drift apart; only time will tell.

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"Everyone Has a Bit of the Other"¹: Music and Identity in Colombia

ZOILA S. MENDOZA

Native American Studies Department, University of California, Davis, Davis, Calif. 95616, U.S.A.
(zsmendoza@ucdavis.edu). 30 V 01

Music, Race, and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia. By Peter Wade. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000. 323 pp.

Music and dance constitute rather than just reflect social reality. This is a statement that a growing literature within the social sciences and the humanities has been able to substantiate, showing that performative practices are powerful forms of social action in their own right. Since the late 1980s, more and more studies of performance have proposed new interdisciplinary approaches that account for the complex ways in which politics and aesthetics come together and constitute history. In *Music, Race, and Nation*, Peter Wade takes a further step in this line of investigation, presenting a theoretically grounded and thoroughly documented book that is destined to become a landmark in the study of the construction of national, regional, and racial identities forged by means of popular music and dance.

By showing how during the middle decades of the 20th century music from the Caribbean coast (La Costa) became the national music of Colombia (and the best-known internationally), Wade sheds light on the fascinating process whereby certain styles associated with marginalized social and racial groups are resignified as symbols of regional and national identity—a process fraught with ambiguities, tensions, and contradictions. In fact, Wade argues convincingly that the capacity of Costeño music for mediating these tensions is what accounts for its acceptance as the national music. Throughout the book he highlights how Costeño musical styles have mediated the tensions between tradition and modernity, region and nation, whiteness and blackness, civilization and primitiveness, the national and the global, and homogeneity and heterogeneity. The study runs into the 1990s, when Costeño music dating from the 1950s and '60s was resurrected in a postmodern, multicultural nationalism.

One of the central arguments of the book, developed at a more theoretical level in chapter 1 but present throughout the text, is that a nationalistic project does not "just try to deny, suppress, or even simply channel an unruly diversity; it actively reconstructs it" (p. 7). Arguing against the all-too-common picture of a homogenizing national elite versus a "heterogeneous," "re-

1. From "Etnia," a song by Grupo Niche, quoted by Wade (p. 211).

sistant" subaltern culture, Wade shows that nationalistic efforts in Colombia resignified rather than erased the difference or diversity embodied in Costeño music and dance. His understanding of nationalism is strengthened by his inquiry into the way in which globalization can activate and underwrite it.

After a rich (although at times thick) theoretical introductory chapter and a second one in which Wade explains how La Costa and its culture fit within the nation, the following chapters run smoothly through the decades of the 20th century, showing that Costeño music has been multivocal and open to many readings. The book vividly portrays the ambiguity of La Costa as a place which is black but also indigenous white, poor, and backward but also the main point of entry for "modernity" and politically vocal but economically weak. The author also argues that those who live inside and outside of La Costa see "Costeño cultural practice as less inhibited, more open, . . . more fun, more 'sexy' . . . less Europeanized" (p. 44). Supported by these two latter analytical elements, Wade demonstrates that for the people of the interior, especially women, Costeño music and dance incarnated a "liberated sexuality." While the image of this liberated sexuality overlapped with the view of people from La Costa as primitive, it also was viewed as "modern."

This idea that "tropical" music and "Latin" music in general can be read as modern and liberating and used as a tool against "traditional" hierarchies and inequalities clarifies many cultural processes elsewhere in Latin America. For example, in Peru, whether in the guise of Altiplano folklore in the southern Andes or Technocumbia in the nation's capital, "tropical" or "Latin" music's implications of modernity and sexually liberating practice have resonated strongly among Andean young women and migrants of highland descent.

Wade examines the most popular Costeño styles, *porro*, *cumbia*, and *vallenato*, showing how their origins have been viewed and how one replaced the other in popularity (roughly between the '50s and the '80s) with the increasing commercialization of Costeño music in the context of the transnational market. In reference to the writing on the origins of these three forms, he shows how "the music is seen as a symbol of fusion, of the overcoming of difference, but the representation of that symbol involves the continual reiteration of difference" (p. 66). The differences among the indigenous, the black, and the white are repeatedly re-created even though the master nationalistic narrative is one of *mestizaje* or race mixture.

Another central argument of the book is that not only in La Costa but also in the nation as a whole, Costeño music cannot be "linked in a simple homological fashion to a particular group or social group and that simple continuities underlie its history" (p. 233). For example, in chapter 4 Wade demonstrates how Costeño music was rearticulated in the city of Barranquilla by many different people and with many different ends as both authentically regional and modern. Finally, a further argument that unfortunately is not fully developed or documented

is that La Costa's image of peacefulness and happiness has been fruitful in the context of the different forms of violence that have plagued Colombia since 1948, facilitating the transformation of Costeño music and dance into national symbols. This is obviously not an easy trail to follow, and Wade did not make it one of his initial goals. Nevertheless, the idea that people in a particular historical or social context may be attracted to a music style that provides a feeling of happiness and/or liberation is worth further exploration.

Scholars who specialize in the study of music and dance would like to have seen more detailed references to the performative aspects of the different forms of Costeño music and dance discussed in the book. A CD accompanying the book and a closer look at the bodily techniques involved in the practice of *porro*, *cumbia*, and *vallenato* would have helped. Despite these minor shortcomings, Wade's book is a valuable contribution and a must-read for those who study nation building, identity construction, and performance politics in Latin America and elsewhere. The author demonstrates that nationalistic projects actively re-create rather than erase diversity and that popular music results from complex interactions and is not a simple product of one particular social sector or the result of political manipulation.

Histories of Race and the Colonial Subject

MARY H. MORAN

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Colgate University, Hamilton, N.Y. 13345, U.S.A. 8 VI 01

Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919–1991. By Marisol de la Cadena. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000. 408 pp.

Rednecks, Eggheads, and Blackfellas: A Study of Racial Power and Intimacy in Australia. By Gillian Cowlishaw. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999. 352 pp.

Indigenous Mestizos and *Rednecks, Eggheads, and Blackfellas* describe similar colonial projects widely separated in time and space. Both pay close attention to small-scale, localized evidence of how "race" and "culture," in both their "scientific" (anthropological) and popular meanings, work to produce hierarchies, exclusions, and values in the wake of European colonialism. Both depend on work in local archives and include a detailed history of how concepts of race and culture have changed over time, locally and globally. Both invoke textual methods and notions of hybridity to argue against

the notion of stable “cultures” adapting to or assimilating each other. Ultimately, they come to very similar conclusions about the silence and invisibility of regimes of race and their ability to withstand any number of attempts at liberal reform. If their two authors haven’t read each other’s book, they should.

De la Cadena sets out, as a “brown skinned, middle class intellectual from Lima” (p. 11), to investigate the phenomenon of “indigenous mestizos” in the old Inca capital of Cuzco. The term “mestizo” refers to literate, economically successful people who participate in and celebrate indigenous cultural practices but reject the identity of “Indian” because they are not “miserable” (poor and uneducated). De la Cadena argues that working-class Cuzqueños have replaced rigid racial categories, based on imputed biology and phenotype, with “infinite degrees of fluid Indianness or mestizness” measured relationally through achievement. Although still discriminatory, this move “includes an antievolutionary impetus as it opens up the possibility to ascend socially without shedding indigenous ways” (p. 6). This subaltern racial formation is indeed a challenge to essentialist categories but converges with the dominant discourse of race by validating other forms of discrimination as legitimate. Speaking of her Cuzco informants, de la Cadena concludes: “While it would be too simplistic to consider them ‘racists,’ it would be more of a mistake to disregard their participation in the dominant forms of discrimination while only documenting their resistance to it” (p. 5).

Using local archives, de la Cadena builds a detailed history of changing categories of social value, carefully distinguishing how the different social classes negotiated their relative status. In particular, she documents that multiple hierarchies of value coexisted in the same historical period. We learn that the elite (“decent”) stratum of lawyers, university professors, and other formal intellectuals claimed to be the cultural descendants of the Inca empire as a means of contesting their exclusion by the coastal, Hispanicized sophisticates of Lima, staging “Incan” pageants and “folk culture” festivals to attract tourists to their city. Working-class mestizos and “grass-roots intellectuals,” in contrast, embraced the *cargo* practices of the local Catholic church as a means of status competition and differentiation. Both groups claimed knowledge of and the ability to speak for “Indians,” variously constructed as simple peasants in need of protection or as raging savages depending on whether they were actively protesting their exclusion. A sustained gender analysis illuminates the fact that ethnic/racial identity carries quite different expectations and implications for men and women.

Although the later chapters of the book, based on the author’s own observations of the *mayordomía* (*cargo*) ceremonies and her interviews with the formidable mestiza market women, are fascinating, the middle section of the book tends to drag for anyone not concerned with the most minute historical details of early 20th-century Cuzco. A tighter editorial hand was needed to keep the overall argument from being lost in the wealth of detail

and repetition. Still, de la Cadena’s project of deconstructing and historicizing colonial categories makes the book interesting and accessible even for non-Latin Americanists.

Gillian Cowlshaw, like de la Cadena a citizen of the country in which she works, examines an isolated cattle station in the Northern Territory of Australia. She argues that the colonization of the north produced different categories of whites claiming to have knowledge of the aboriginal inhabitants; “redneck” cattle ranchers, whose experience often included the intimacies of intermarriage and child fosterage, and “egghead” anthropologists and government functionaries, who looked down on the settlers at the same time that they depended on them for access to the Rembarrnga people. Several generations of Rembarrnga lived in a permanent labor and kinship relationship with the station owners which Cowlshaw documents with life histories, reports to government agencies, and even a family photo album.

The Aborigines struggled to maintain their ceremonies, initiations, and relationship with the land even as they interacted with whites as employers, state agents, advocates, adversaries, lovers, family members, and sources of material goods. Cowlshaw charts the rapid shifts in national policy from overt acceptance of race as a marker of biological difference to something very similar to the Cuzco model: the redefinition of those who achieved education and outward assimilation as “citizens of Australia” rather than “wards of the state.” Those who failed and remained “wards” (by the 1950s, official government policy was avoiding the word “Aborigine” altogether) had only themselves, not their “race,” to blame. “It was also assumed that difference equalled hierarchy. To recognise and legitimise what we now call cultural differences, to allow different cultures to live side by side, would be to entrench an unacceptable inequality and threaten the unity of Australia” (p. 181). The “rednecks,” unburdened by such noble ideas and self-consciously “racist” in their views, nevertheless interacted with Aborigines much more as fellow human beings worthy of concern and care. Official state policy was frequently as opaque to them as to the Rembarrnga.

While de la Cadena may be faulted for giving us too much detail, Cowlshaw frequently gives us too little. The text assumes some knowledge of “official” Australian history and national culture. Nevertheless, she creates a warm, generous portrait of real people, both black and white, without trying to paper over the contradictions of love, betrayal, and exploitation that shaped these individual biographies.

Cowlshaw uses the metaphor of the palimpsest, or painted-over surface, to describe the colonial process by which Rembarrnga culture became intertwined with that of the “whitefellas”: “The original remains, hidden by new patterns, but still there, and able to re-emerge, perhaps in an altered form as the foreign surface fails to congeal or is damaged by the still living original pulsing beneath it. . . . These cultural surfaces show traces of unfinished designs and delayed or abandoned intentions” (p. 5). While de la Cadena argues that “Indians and mes-

tizos emerge from interaction and not from evolution" (p. 6), Cowlishaw finds a carefully preserved substratum serving as the primary model through which Rembarnga interpret their historical position. Contests over identity go on at one level, but the truly radical cultural difference cannot be acknowledged by the state because it is too threatening. "What was denied in Australia as in other colonies was that indigenous people could represent a challenge to the West by demonstrating the possibility of a fundamentally different sort of society, with a radically different epistemology and ontology" (p. 301).

Perhaps something of this is going on in Peru, where Indians who learn to read and write by definition cease to be Indians anymore, or in my own field site of Liberia, where "civilized natives" similarly maintain ethnic identity while at the same time claiming the prestige that accrues to Western education and wage labor. What is certain is that this process of local differentiation and negotiation of status is a legacy of colonialism everywhere. The patient work of careful scholars like de la Cadena and Cowlishaw, looking for evidence in such unlikely places as a family photo album, is slowly making this history visible.

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