

Chapter Title: CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS: Australian  
Indigeneity, Inequality, and Militarization in the Twenty-First Century  
Chapter Author(s): EVE DARIAN-SMITH

Book Title: Ethnicity, Commodity, In/Corporation  
Book Editor(s): GEORGE PAUL MEIU, JEAN COMAROFF, JOHN L. COMAROFF  
Published by: Indiana University Press. (2020)  
Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv12sdz39.12>

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## EIGHT



### CULTURAL COMMODIFICATION IN GLOBAL CONTEXTS

#### Australian Indigeneity, Inequality, and Militaryization in the Twenty-First Century

EVE DARIAN-SMITH

IN MANY WAYS THE BASIC premise of the book *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009)—that ethnicity is increasingly being incorporated and culture commodified in our current age of image entrepreneurialism and late capitalist enterprise—is even more globally evident now than it was ten years ago. In this essay, I want to build on *Ethnicity, Inc.*’s provocations and explore the “costs and contradictions” associated with the turning of culture into a marketable product (2009, 139). Specifically, I want to speak to the long histories of colonialism that are still very much in play in the context of neoliberalism. The Comaroffs acknowledge in their conclusion of the book that in the poorest parts of the world “the sale of cultural products, and the simulacra of ethnicized selfhood” may be the “only viable means of survival.” That being said, *Ethnicity, Inc.* talks about the wide variety of ways in which “traditional” peoples “constantly find new, often ingenious ways to partake of the identity economy” and in the process become “thoroughly modern” (2009, 149). The account concludes on a rather hopeful tone, arguing that against great odds and long histories of oppression, some indigenous communities have managed to adroitly and astutely find remarkable ways to survive in a global capitalist system and in the process revitalize and perhaps even reinvent a sense of self and community.

Certainly, many of the examples cited in *Ethnicity, Inc.* are uplifting and point to new forms of “self-realization, sentiment, entitlement, enrichment” among some of the most historically oppressed people in the world. Yet these examples are not necessarily reassuring. Indigenous communities constitute some 360 million people, and it should not be forgotten that the number

of indigenous peoples who have been able to engage in ethnocapitalism is extremely small. Even in the United States, where some tribes have established casinos and made enormous profits, the vast majority of indigenous peoples in both federally and nonfederally recognized tribes continue to constitute the most impoverished and disadvantaged sector of society. Mass incarceration, unemployment, domestic violence, suicide, disease—all of these societal issues have escalated on and off reservations in recent years. For just as there are growing inequalities in developed Western societies, so is there growing inequality among indigenous peoples worldwide with only a very small number coming up “winners”—the indigenous 1 percent (to use the language of the Occupy movement). The ramifications in the United States is that only the indigenous 1 percent who have parlayed their ethnopreneurialism into moneymaking ventures, which includes establishing Indian-owned casinos, can afford to be involved in what the Comaroffs call “lawfare” against the state. The end result is that the state can blatantly ignore the remaining 99 percent who, not being able to access the legal system, are simply deemed irrelevant.

John and Jean Comaroff (2009, 139) are acutely aware of the costs and contradictions in *Ethnicity, Inc.* They write “it has *both* insurgent possibility *and* a tendency to deepen prevailing lines of inequality, the capacity *both* to enable *and* to disable, the power *both* to animate and to annihilate.” Yet throughout the book, they linger on the brighter side—“the promise”—of these contradictions, whereas I want to focus on the mutually constituting relations between enabling/disabling and animating/annihilating that I ultimately see as presenting a darker trajectory that is deeply worrisome. In the first part of this chapter, I present a brief historical overview of the marketing of cultural difference in white Australia. This history is necessary to understand the entwined relations between the country’s domestic policies over Indigenous minorities and its international policies with respect to receiving certain immigrants. This history also underscores the significance of the Aboriginal art industry, which emerged in the 1970s and marked to some degree a new era of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Despite the promise of this shift (which in many ways echoes the optimism of *Ethnicity, Inc.*), my interest lies in exploring to what degree ethnopreneurialism in the ensuing decades may have inadvertently aided and abetted insidious forms of neocolonialism that have become one of the hallmarks of today’s late capitalist world.

Building on this discussion, in the second part of the chapter, I argue for the need to reframe conversations about ethnicity, inc. to better accommodate contemporary global processes. Since the writing of *Ethnicity, Inc.* it seems that three global concerns have become more pronounced and, I suggest, of

particular interest in the context of ethnic-capitalism. These are (1) rising global inequality; (2) mass movements of people around the world fleeing regional wars, conflict, environmental degradation, and natural disasters; and (3) the militarization of nation-states and the justification of particular social policies—both domestic and international—in the name of securitizing national interests. These three intertwined concerns are of particular interest because they cumulatively ensure that increasingly marginalized peoples of the world have less, not more, access and opportunity to take advantage of the manifestations and implications of ethnicity, inc.

With respect to global inequality, the deepening gap between the rich and poor is now listed by the World Economic Forum as its number-one concern because it weakens “social cohesion and security” and hence long-term economic development.<sup>1</sup> Around the world, more and more people are outraged by the decline of the middle classes as expressed by the Occupy movement of 2011. Rising global inequality impacts all countries and regions of the world, be these in the global South or the global North (Collier 2008; Stiglitz 2012). However, given that Indigenous peoples are typically the most impoverished sector of any society and so the most economically and politically vulnerable, global inequality impacts indigenous peoples disproportionately. They are the first to bear the brunt of climate change, environmental devastation, and encroachments on their natural resources (i.e., minerals, water, and biological matter). In times of economic austerity, indigenous peoples are the first to feel the economic pinch and the denial of state-sponsored social services. As a result, livelihoods and cultures are deeply threatened. Moreover, concepts such as indigenous sovereignty and self-determination are profoundly undermined and in a growing number of cases deemed materially irrelevant by financiers, mining companies, development agencies, governments and so on. In short, indigenous peoples are the first to be subject to what Saskia Sassen (2014, 1) calls “a new logics of *expulsion*” from political life.

Rising global inequality underscores that for most indigenous communities, corporatizing and entering the ethnicity, inc. game is the only option available whether they live in the very poorest or the very wealthiest parts of the world. This is because “the current systemic deepening of capitalist relations” reduces all value to economic marketability and increasingly blocks out any other means of social being and economic existence (Sassen 2014, 10). Hence it is increasingly the case that, in most instances, indigenous groups have little choice but to engage in a late capitalism system on terms determined by nonindigenous players (Darian-Smith 2004). The alternative is to face the plight that many indigenous peoples have experienced for centuries under colonial oppression—to be shunned, ignored, silenced, neglected, or ultimately

abandoned (Povinelli 2011). In short, indigenous peoples must commodify their ethnic identity or face a very real threat of extinction. Choice—if one can call it such—is limited. Certainly, the Comaroffs are aware in their account of enduring colonial oppression, but I think we need to be more explicit about the engulfing forces of twenty-first-century global inequality in thinking about the forms, processes, risks, and consequences of identity entrepreneurialism.

With respect to refugees and mass movements of people around the world, the figures have risen dramatically since *Ethnicity, Inc.* was published. As reported by the Office of the United Nation's High Commission for Refugees only a few months ago, there are now 68.5 million people on the move (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2018). The numbers of displaced people is the highest recorded in the United Nation agency's fifty-four year history. As a result, we are living in an era of what Steven Vertovec (2011) calls "super-diversity" that is recasting the cultural politics of nation and social organization against a backdrop of mass human migration and the complex melding of religious and ethnic plurality. As we have all witnessed in the European Union's response to Syrian refugees, super-diversity highlights anxieties of state nationalism that are manifesting globally in xenophobia, racism, and brutal state policies of exclusion. The legislation passed by Danish lawmakers in late January 2016 that allows government agencies to seize cash and valuables from asylum seekers (the so-called jewelry bill) is only one instance of the harsh sentiment being expressed by governments across Europe toward refugees. At an international level, populist movements that ushered in Brexit in the United Kingdom and Donald Trump as president in the United States highlight that emerging around the world is the rise of ultra-nationalist ideologies that are in part a response to mass movements of people.

With respect to the militarization of nation-states, this is an artifact of modernity that has taken on specific valence in recent decades (Tilly 1985; Tarrow 2012). Militarization is more than the use of military strategies to shore up state power, the preparedness of a country to go to war, or the sponsorship of military ideals. Rather, it speaks to the deeply embedded cultural values of a given society. "Among those distinctive core beliefs are the notion that the world is a dangerous place, that there are naturally those who must be protected and, conversely, those who must protect, and that every mature and serious government must have a military to secure the protection of its people" (Frühstück 2017, 2). Ramped-up security state apparatuses are usually discussed with respect to the emergence of neoliberal polices that accompanied the global north's policing of the global south through new modes of human security and humanitarian aid. These activities dominated international relations in the 1990s and were supported by the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and

the United Nations (Amar 2013). I would add to this narrative by arguing that the same logics whereby the West sought to control the rest can be seen to be operating within Western nations in their dealing with “domestic” foreigners, be these “vulnerable” indigenous peoples, racialized minorities, or criminalized immigrants.

In thinking about some of the risks and contradictions of ethnicity, inc., I wonder how ethnic-entrepreneurialism plays out in the context of a heightened rhetoric of militarization that presents nation-states as seemingly besieged by the impending threat of mass asylum seekers and a dilution of nationalist ideologies, identities, symbolisms, and imagery. In a sense I want to play with the tensions between ethnicity, inc. and nationality, inc.—between indigenous minorities and dominant nationalist majorities competing in a more encompassing global political economy for market share. In Jean and John Comaroff’s (2009) book, ethnicity, inc. and nationality, inc. are discussed as discrete phenomena, but I would like to suggest that they are intrinsically and intimately connected. Both forms of commodification speak to what George Yúdice calls “culture-as-resource.” In his book, *The Expediency of Culture* (2003), Yúdice refers to the ways culture-as-a-commodity is managed not only through the nation-state but also more and more through a global political economy coordinated “by corporations and the international non-governmental sector (e.g., UNESCO, foundations, nongovernmental organizations). Despite this global circulation, or perhaps because of it, there has emerged a new international division of cultural labor that imbricates local difference with transnational administration and investment” (4). Yúdice’s concept of culture-as-resource applies to minority groups as well as nation-states that are both selling essentialized cultural wares and competing for an international economic investment market composed of tourists and corporations. However, it should be noted that what is at stake is more than economic profits since market share equates in many ways with how cultural authority is perceived and power legitimated. So, in a broader sense the successes and failures of ethnocapitalism also reflect the success and failures of marginalized peoples to claim a presence in mainstream society.

Thinking about the essentializing of ethnicity and how different forms of cultural commodification operate through local, national, regional, and global frameworks speaks to my broader research agenda. Indigeneity can be interpreted as a form of ethnicity and for many the choice between an indigenous or ethnic identity is fluid and not mutually exclusive. For other Indigenous peoples, tribal identity may be in tension, or even conflict with a more pan-indigenous ethnic identity. As noted by Duane Champagne (2015), “Often indigenous

ethnic groupings are more recognizable to nation-states, since they are willing to conform to the demands and definitions of national political interest groups. In Canada, Métis form detribalized groups with distinct mixed indigenous and European traditions. The Métis seeks rights that are distinguished from tribal Indigenous nations.” Notwithstanding the complexities of identity formation and articulation, what interests me are the ways contemporary indigenous politics play out within global contexts that are in turn shifting the terms of conflict between indigenous peoples and state governments.

My underling argument is that too often indigenous politics—and indigenous studies in general—are framed by national borders and classified as domestic issues. But I argue that a country’s policies toward its indigenous peoples, and the place of those indigenous peoples within a national imaginary, are constantly being deflected through that country’s larger relationship with the rest of the world (Mawani 2009; Darian-Smith 2013; see Ford 2011; Ford and Rowse 2013; Lowe 2015). No nation-state operates as an island, no matter how often and how determinedly the island rhetoric is mobilized (as is the case of Australia and the United Kingdom). In the context of contemporary globalization, the artifice of a nation-state’s autonomy and cultural homogeneity is more evident today than ever before. Hence immigration policies seeking to keep certain “aliens” outside the nation-state and maintain the myth of a homogenous national identity are very much connected to a state’s indigenous policies seeking to manage domestic “aliens” within (see Parker 2015). And the militarization of state power provides the material and institutional networks to manage these two fronts of security implementation.

These intersecting politics and policies, however, are often overlooked in mainstream political and social thinking. And somewhat curiously, scholars of indigenous studies and scholars of immigration seem determined to keep these arenas of cultural politics analytically separated (cf. Coutin, Richland, and Fortin 2014; Volpp 2015, 291n10). Thinking about the politics of indigeneity—and the mobilization of tribal and ethnic indigenous identities—within a more encompassing global perspective is an approach that explicitly overlays and melds these literatures and scholarly insights.

#### MARKETING CULTURAL DIFFERENCE IN WHITE AUSTRALIA

In thinking about global inequality and super-diversity, I turn to the cultural politics surrounding Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over the past forty years. Contemporary Australian politics provides



an exemplary site through which to think about the incorporation of ethnic groups and commodification of cultural identity for some of the most impoverished peoples in the world. What I argue is that the few indigenous Australians who have participated in ethnocapitalism underscore that it is an enormously ambiguous and risky business, with no ensurance of positive outcomes for either themselves or the wider indigenous population within Australian society. Moreover, as I go on to discuss, when we step back from ethnoenterprise within the nation-state context and take in a broader global picture, cultural capitalism may have unforeseen negative consequences that we are only now beginning to see and appreciate.

The history of British colonialism in Australia, and its impact on the continent's Aboriginal peoples, is very well documented (see Harris 1972; Reynolds 2006, 2013; Gammage 2013; Broome 2010; Hughes 1988). When Captain Cook "discovered" and laid claim to the island continent in 1770, it is estimated that there existed a population of up to 1 million Aboriginal people, making up over 250 different nations speaking nearly as many different languages. Despite the clear evidence of indigenous peoples, Cook declared the continent *terra nullius* (empty land) and established the legal basis for a British settlement to be founded.<sup>2</sup> Under Capitan Arthur Philip, a penal colony was established in Sydney Cove in 1788. Very swiftly European diseases such as smallpox and influenza wiped out many of the surrounding Aboriginal communities. According to Lieutenant Fowell in 1789, only one year after the colony had begun, "Every boat that went down the harbour found them lying dead on the beaches and in the caverns of the rocks. . . . They were generally found with the remains of a small fire on each side of them and some water left within their reach."<sup>3</sup> Those Aboriginal peoples that were not wiped out by disease were driven from their lands as the British settlement grew and land cleared for farming. Many were hunted and killed if they resisted at all, since most settlers at the time considered Aboriginal people akin to dingoes, emus, and kangaroos.<sup>4</sup>

A great deal can be said about Australia's horrifying colonial history. In this chapter, my interest lies in the British and then Australian governments' explicit policies to essentialize and commodify indigenous peoples' cultural difference as a strategy of colonial management. Australia, like other British settler societies, packaged indigenous peoples as backward, uncivilized, violent, lawless, and to a large degree nonhuman. A whole industry of decorative arts for the home featuring exoticized black men and women was established in the colonial era. Quaint silver figurines of fierce spear-throwing indigenous peoples frolicking with kangaroos mounted on blown emu eggs were very popular for the sideboard or tabletop in the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth



centuries. These and similar decorative pieces deliberately belittled and denigrated aboriginal peoples, visually categorizing them as part of the country's exotic flora and fauna. This attitude was institutionalized in government policy and enabled the state to keep indigenous communities at an arm's distance, with the prevailing hope that they would eventually die out and become extinct (Harris 1972, 13). When Aboriginal people failed in this regard, derogatory imagery helped to substantiate legal policies of land dispossession and justified lack of governmental welfare and support for impoverished Indigenous communities.

Legal, social, and economic forms of discrimination against indigenous peoples continued well into the twentieth century despite pockets of resistance such as the Australian Aborigines' League, which was started by indigenous activists in Melbourne in 1934, and the Aborigines Progressive Association, which was a related Sydney organization that started in 1937 (see Miller 2012; Attwood and Markus 2004). World War II considerably slowed down Aboriginal activists' demands for civil and political rights, and it was not until the 1960s that real change occurred with the establishing of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA),<sup>5</sup> which was heavily influenced by the NAACP and black civil rights reforms in the United States (Miller 2012; Darian-Smith 2012). As international media attention gained momentum condemning Australia's treatment of its indigenous peoples, the 1967 referendum was enthusiastically passed declaring that Aboriginal peoples must be treated as humans and included in the counting of the Australian population. One result was that derogatory images of black Australians went out of fashion, though not out of circulation, as evidenced by the decorative motifs on the country's coins.

It is interesting that at the same time that Australian society expressed a softening of racist attitudes toward its indigenous peoples in the 1960s the country also experienced a softening of racist attitudes toward darker-skinned immigrants. Coinciding with the 1967 referendum was the slow dismantling of Australia's White Australia Policy, which deliberately favored immigrants from English-speaking and European backgrounds. The White Australia policy was officially dropped in 1975. This allowing of more ethnically diverse immigrants into the country coincided with a lesser need to annihilate or assimilate the country's "domestic racial problem." However, while the 1960s and 1970s experienced growth in a more culturally diverse and racially tolerant Australian society, the Australian government was still deeply biased against indigenous peoples and practiced a range of paternalistic and discriminatory laws such as the child removal policy that resulted in the Stolen Generations, which were not entirely abolished until the 1980s (see generally Harris 1972; Broome 2010).

### THE RISE OF THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ART MOVEMENT

The modern Australian indigenous art movement can be dated from the 1970s.<sup>6</sup> In 1965, a federal-sponsored tourism report highlighted the possibility of developing Aboriginal arts to sell to foreign visitors. This report helped promote the establishment of a government sponsored company to facilitate the sale of indigenous art called the Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Pty Ltd in 1971. This coincided with a shift in policies toward indigenous communities within the government that sponsored the concept of self-determination and helped promote aboriginal cultures rather than pursuing aggressive former policies of assimilation (Altman 2007, 44).

At the same time that federal legislation was softening toward indigenous peoples, in remote outback communities a new interest was developing among some white Australians in helping indigenous communities who had been devastated by settler colonialism. Against Australia's violent colonial backdrop, a small group of Aboriginal people were encouraged to draw on canvas and wood with acrylic paints provided by a white schoolteacher named Geoffrey Bardon. The year was 1971, and the indigenous community was living in Papunya, a small town in the deep desert outback of the Northern Territory approximately 240 kilometers northwest of Alice Springs. Community members came from a number of different tribes that had been forcibly removed from their ancestral lands and gathered together in the hope of promoting assimilation into white society. Bardon encouraged first schoolchildren and then adult men to paint murals that represented their cultural traditions, body adornment, sacred knowledge, and relationship to the land (see Bardon 1979, 1991). The men expressed themselves in this new European visual medium, painting old cars, hubcaps, and construction debris when they could not afford more conventional canvas and paper. The art was typically executed by a group of artists working together on the ground in a style that came to be colloquially called "dot painting." The original group of artists is widely considered to have started the Papunya Tula Art Movement that included subsequently famous black artists such as Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri and Kaapa Tjampitjinpa. Dot painting differed enormously from more traditional indigenous art and heralded in what art critic Robert Hughes (2005) later called the "last great art movement of the 20th century."

A large body of literature explores the history and importance of Aboriginal desert art and its influence on subsequent art cooperatives in rural and urban

centers around Australia over the past forty years (Bardon and Bardon 2006; Johnson 2007; McCulloch and McCulloch Childs 2008; Kleinert and Neale 2000; Caruana 2003; Myers 2002). What is fascinating here is that, against great odds and with really very few options available, about twenty men at Papunya incorporated and set up their own company (Papunya Tula Artists Ltd.) to help organize the sale of their artwork in 1972.<sup>7</sup> This was necessary given the exploitative nature of white art dealers who slowly, and then more aggressively in the 1980s and 1990s, began marketing dot paintings to national and international art markets. Drawing on the success of the Papunya model, many other art cooperatives were established throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Today Desart, a nonprofit Central Australia Aboriginal organization supporting over forty community-based art centers and ANKAAA (Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists) are the leading networks supporting a vast number of local artists and art centers in rural areas.<sup>8</sup> Within major cities there also exists an extensive network of incorporated art cooperatives, and a good number of these are managed or owned by Aborigines. This successful commodification of culture falls within the optimistic trajectory described in *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009).

In purely economic terms, contemporary Australian indigenous art is big business, and some pieces are reaching very high prices on the global art market. Within Australia, national galleries now have extensive Aboriginal art holdings and major indigenous art prizes such as the National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award have been established to sponsor and support indigenous artists. Black art is now widely accepted by the nonindigenous society and features in corporate collections, decorates (with unexamined irony) mining company foyers, and greets the visitor to Parliament House in Canberra in the form of a 196-square-meter floor mural. Moreover, Aboriginal art is not confined to so-called high culture, and generic dot images appear on many commodities from T-shirts and clothing, to public transport and airplanes. Dot painting has become a fashionable aesthetic. Despite large problems of art fraud, exploitation, cultural appropriation, and lack of government oversight,<sup>9</sup> as well as various disagreements within some indigenous communities about what sacred symbols and knowledge should be visually presented, there is general consensus by indigenous and nonindigenous peoples that contemporary Aboriginal art has made a significant contribution to the well-being of indigenous Australians. According to Japingka Gallery, located in Perth and representing some of the country's most famous Aboriginal artists for over thirty years, these successful outcomes include:

- Establishing cultural and historic ties to land as part of Native Title transactions
- Maintaining cultural and social cohesion via traditional education methods
- Providing economic stimulus, especially in remote communities
- Engendering cultural pride across generations
- Underpinning return to Country projects in outlying areas.<sup>10</sup>

#### REVISITING *ETHNICITY, INC.* THROUGH AUSTRALIA'S CULTURAL IDENTITY POLITICS

Given the apparent success of the Australian Aboriginal art movement in both social and economic terms what, may one ask, is the problem? This is the question I asked myself over twenty-years ago when I wrote about competing images of Aboriginal culture in Australian society (Darian-Smith 1993). As a budding intellectual property lawyer, I had taken a graduate seminar on law and the arts and was dismayed by the widespread use of Aboriginal dot painting on a vast range of commodities that did not give due credit to the artists and did not compensate for cultural appropriation.<sup>11</sup> This lack of legal recognition for collaboratively produced art highlighted a clash between a Western art market that promoted and protected the “authentic” work of individual artists, and the implicit depreciation of coauthored artwork that did not sit within a common-law intellectual property regime.

Moreover, I was perplexed by the way white Australian society enthusiastically embraced this new cultural packaging and aesthetic of indigeneity given that at the same time splashed all over the media were horrifying stories of the Stolen Generations and rising numbers of Aboriginal deaths in custody. As I argued back then, precisely because of the horrific tales of discrimination and violence perpetrated by police on indigenous communities, mainstream society in an effort to counter such open hostility latched on to the abstract and brightly colored art as a public expression of its cultural and political inclusiveness of Indigenous peoples into mainstream society.

Aboriginal art, in the National Gallery or on a cornflakes box, is not politically neutral. It constitutes prejudice by reconfirming the social and legal preconditions by which bias against Aborigines can be considered legitimate. And it does so by steeping the purchase [and display] of black art with moral authority in what James Clifford has called a ‘salvaging’ operation. In other words, black art is bought because it represents for westerners the illusion of a traditional Aboriginal heritage. It functions to

lock contemporary Aborigines into a historical as well as an ideological past, enhanced by a romanticism of their community artistic experience and production. . . . Championing Aboriginal art is a popular, attractive and effective way of pretending material differences do not exist. Abstract dots and swirls create social distance. Aboriginal art, above all else, symbolizes for white society an identifiable boundary and thus a relationship of cultural difference and, implicitly, continued domination (Darian-Smith 1993, 65–66).

Today, over twenty years later, both in Australia and around the world, decorative Aboriginal dot painting is instantly recognizable as pertaining to the country's indigenous communities. It may well be the most effective packaging and branding of indigeneity in modern history, homogenizing Aboriginal culture under one amorphous aesthetic umbrella, conflating the cultures and concerns of urban and rural Indigenous peoples while blurring the symbols of deserts with rainforests with big cities. Unfortunately, my comment made over twenty years ago, that "Aboriginality in art has come to represent, in a remarkable sense, Aborigines themselves" appears to ring truer today than ever before (Darian-Smith 1993, 61). This is not to say that Aboriginal art should be thought of as a hoax or being inauthentic in some way—far from it. What it does underscore, however, is that in this particular case indigenous peoples are not able to control the interpretation and use of their ethnocommodity once it enters the national or transnational imaginary. This suggests that they are inadvertently participating in a national cultural politics that is quick to lump them together as a homogenous and essentialized group; denies full expression of indigenous peoples' complex and widely diversified cultural, political, economic, and social needs; and downplays claims of colonial racial oppression and contemporary dispossession. At the same time, mainstream Australian society can represent to the world a vision of multicultural inclusiveness and racial toleration.

Ethnicity, inc., as it unfolds in the context of the Australian Indigenous art industry, vividly presents some of its deeply embedded costs and contradictions (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009, 81). On the one hand, the incorporation of Aboriginal companies and the marketing of Aboriginal culture has helped some Indigenous peoples' to make reasonable livelihoods and become "thoroughly modern" (149). It has also undeniably helped to revitalize and regenerate some Aboriginal cultures and tribal knowledge, as well as to introduce into the white national polity positive images of a generalized Australian indigeneity. On the other hand, it can be argued that the costs for Aboriginal peoples as a whole have been significant. The enthusiastic embracing by white Australians of a generic indigenous aesthetics has helped reinforce monolithic images and stereotypes of indigenous peoples living in traditional and premodern

circumstances, far from urban centers and the hubs of Australia's political and economic life (Darian-Smith 1993, 2002, 2004). As represented by abstract dots and lines, indigenous peoples have become visually removed as "human" from mainstream society and delegated, once again, out of sight and of mind in a fashion that echoes former colonial strategies of oppression, dispossession and assimilation. At the same time, Aboriginal people as the producers of a circulated commodity within national/international art markets have become very materially relevant but only in so far as they are necessary for the art's authenticity and provenance that in turn correlates to market value.

#### NORTHERN TERRITORY NATIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE—"THE INTERVENTION"

When reading Australia's Indigenous cultural politics against a backdrop of the twenty-first century global inequality and mass movements of people, the costs and contradictions embedded within ethnicity, inc. appear even more pronounced. One event that underscores these costs and contradictions and the heavy-handed militarization of state policies is the Northern Territory National Emergency Response—often referred to as the Intervention. In 2007, the Australian federal government declared the need to enact emergency measures to address claims of sexual abuse and neglect of Aboriginal children. Without consulting with indigenous communities, the government quickly sent the army into the remote Northern Territory.<sup>12</sup> As a result of the emergency action, seventy-three Aboriginal communities and town camps were targeted for a range of changes to welfare services, land tenure, and other civil and political rights. Apart from outlawing the use of alcohol, Aboriginal people's welfare checks were partially quarantined and their income managed, mandatory medical checks were performed on children to ascertain abuse, and indigenous landholdings were initially confiscated under five-year leases, which evolved into forty- to ninety-year lease holds by the federal government in return for essential services (Bray et al. 2012; Bielefeld 2014).<sup>13</sup> Under the Intervention, legal actions against indigenous peoples were exempted from considering customary law and cultural practices, and indigenous peoples lost their right to manage access permits for non-Aborigines to enter their local communities. The net result was that all sense of dignity and self-determination, including control over traditional lands, was taken away from these remote indigenous groups (see Collingwood-Whittick 2012).

In 2007, the Intervention received bipartisan political backing as well as the support of a few indigenous leaders. But over the years, it has been widely



and openly criticized by many Aboriginal elders and community leaders, civil society organizations and NGOs, the United Nations, and a broad sector of Australia's public who view it as a failure for failing to meet the real needs of Aboriginal communities. In the ten years since its implementation, there is no evidence or reporting of any person being prosecuted for child sexual abuse, which was the original justification for its implementation. In 2012, new policies were introduced to further extend government powers over indigenous communities under the new "Stronger Futures legislation." This extension incited Malcolm Frazer, the former prime minister of Australia, to declare the legislation one hundred years out of date and fundamentally "racist" and "paternalistic." Despite widespread protests by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leaders, Concerned Citizens of Australia and Amnesty International, the Intervention has been extended until 2022. According to Michele Harris, a tireless campaigner against the Northern Territory Intervention and founder of "concerned Australians,"<sup>14</sup> the Australian government took over the management of the Northern Territory as a deliberate strategy of occupation:

Early inklings of change occurred in 2004 with the management of grants being transferred from communities to government's newly established Indigenous Coordination Centres. More ominous were the Amendments of 2006 to the Aboriginal Land Rights Act and the memoranda of agreements that followed. Government had made it clear that it wished to re-engage itself directly in the control of community land through leasing options, as well as to open up Aboriginal land for development and mining purposes. The plan was to empty the homelands. This has not changed. However, it was recognised that achieving this would be politically fraught—it would need to be accomplished in a manner that would not off-side mainstream Australia. Removing Aboriginal people from their land and taking control over their communities would need to be presented in a way that Australians would believe to be to Aboriginal advantage, whatever the tactics.<sup>15</sup>

A great deal more can be said about the Intervention—its horrors, its failings, its robbing of indigenous communities of their integrity, cultural identity, and land rights as mining companies moved in to dig up minerals and uranium waste is dumped (Altman and Hinkson 2010).<sup>16</sup> Employment is almost nonexistent in the controlled communities and despair is widely evident. Aboriginal artists now find it nearly impossible to produce and sell their work, and many indigenous cultural centers have had to close their doors. Even the art cooperative Papunya Tula Artists Limited that was established back in 1972 to help sell the first dot paintings has had to move its operations out of state to Western Australia.



Experiencing the Intervention firsthand, Ali Cobby Eckerman (2015), an acclaimed Aboriginal poet, helps give a sense of the conditions under which indigenous communities suffered and continue to suffer:

The whirlpool of public servants continued to crawl across the NT. Without consultation, or the use of local language interpreters, many incidents occurred. A toilet block was built on a sacred site. In some communities the administration offices were totally enclosed in barbed wire. Public servants could drink on communities, within view of residents. A police station was built at Titjkala as promised, but was never staffed. Depression among Aboriginal people escalated, and fatalities suggest the suicide rate has tripled.

She goes on to say that she thinks Australia will never recover:

With the implementation of The Intervention I personally felt the betrayal of Australia; the moment when 'good' people allowed their neighbors to be treated in a manner they would not tolerate in any form. . . . This was the moment that any sense of equality and respect, garnered over the previous long years by our grandparents and parents, was abandoned by Australia's majority.

According to Elizabeth Povinelli (2011, 48), the Intervention and its supporters are "symptomatic of a broader conservative agenda in contemporary Australia that sought to, and has been quite effective at, hegemonizing the political and social field by using images of primitive sexuality to figure an absolute difference and hierarchy between the modern and ancient, personal freedom and customary constraint, depersonalized common truths and identity-based prejudices."

Whether or not this interpretation of events would be recognized by mainstream Australian society, it is clear that the Northern Territory Intervention cannot be disentangled from long-standing colonial oppression and attempts by the federal government to install new military strategies to "manage" indigenous peoples precisely at a time when they are beginning to gain modest traction socially, politically, legally, and economically (Ford and Rowse 2013; Fisher 2015). It could also be argued the Intervention, while specifically targeting indigenous peoples, is part of larger regulatory state practices that are "premised upon a neo-liberal combination of market competition, privatized institutions, and decentered, at-a-distance forms of state regulation" (Braithwaite 2000, 222).

How are we to understand the formation and continuing implementation of the Northern Territory Intervention, which is to be kept in place until 2022? For the purposes of this chapter, I am interested in the ways the commodification of indigenous culture and abstraction of indigeneity within the Aboriginal art industry may have helped inoculate mainstream Australian society from responding

to the increasing militarization of its indigenous peoples. Did the costs and contradictions of ethnicity, inc. that inadvertently reinforced Aboriginal stereotypes and us/them social distancing in a sense pave the way for the military intervention and forced containment of Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory? My tentative response is yes. But I think there is more going on than meets the eye and that this only becomes apparent by stepping back from analyzing indigenous issues within a national framework and thinking about Aboriginal cultural politics and the costs and contradictions of ethnic-entrepreneurialism within a more encompassing global political economic context.

Saskia Sassen (2014, 10) argued that land grabbing is the hallmark of our current system of global capitalism and that this has enormously exacerbated global inequality. She wrote that “from the perspective of today’s capitalism, the natural resources of much of Africa, Latin America, and central Asia are more important than the people on those lands as workers or consumers.” Wendy Brown (2015, 4) added, “The economization of everything and every sphere, including political life, desensitizes us to the bold contradiction between an allegedly free-market economy and a state now wholly in service to and controlled by it.” In the context of Australia, and specifically the mineral rich lands of the Northern Territory, indigenous peoples are an obstacle to mining and other forms of extractive industry and in a very real sense need to be cordoned off and blocked from participating in it as either landholders negotiating with companies or as mobilized “mobs” resisting their takeover. So, the federal government’s support of private mining industries (many of these Chinese-based companies) is part of the equation in understanding the ongoing implementation of the Northern Territory Intervention. The federal government is inordinately anxious to remove any obstacles to extractive industrial development.

While the Intervention can and should be interpreted as part of a continuing colonial history of land grabbing and land management of Aboriginal peoples (Goodhall 2008; Ford and Rowse 2013), we should not forget my earlier point that all domestic policies relating to indigenous communities must be read against the country’s wider global/transnational relationship to the rest of the world. Hence another dimension to understanding the continuing implementation of the Northern Territory Intervention relates to the global challenge presented by mass migrations of people and the “super diversity” of religions and cultures that this mass movement brings. For in a very pragmatic sense, the cordoning off of Aboriginal communities behind barbed wire and under military supervision finds a ready template in the dozens of Australian Immigration Detention Centers that have sprung up across the country in largely remote areas over the past two decades. The government argues that these

Detention Centers are necessary to process so-called “illegal boat people” who have arrived on Australia’s shores fleeing war and persecution in conflict zones. Beginning in 1992, all people entering Australia without a visa are mandatorily moved to detention centers for processing. In the 1970s and 1980s refugees came primarily from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. More recently they have been arriving from Afghanistan and Sri Lanka, smuggled across the seas via Indonesia and Malaysia, many of them losing their lives as boats have subsided into the Indian Ocean or crashed along the northern Australian shores.

While the numbers of refugees seeking asylum in Australia is relatively small compared to other receiving countries such as Germany or the United States, refugees have remained a highly controversial issue and have been used by both the right and left political parties to incite racism, xenophobia and serve their respective political objectives. The detention centers, apparently based on Guantanamo and other US offshoring facilities (see Barder 2015),<sup>17</sup> have become a source of extreme political and social contestation within mainstream Australian society. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the United Nations have condemned practices of indefinite detainment which literally have abandoned asylum seekers to lives of imprisonment. Inside the Detention Centers, there are periodic demonstrations and riots, as well as numerous reports of self-cutting, hunger strikes and suicide. According to Christopher Foulkes:

Scholars have noted Australians’ hardening attitudes toward low-skilled, non-white migrants such as Middle Easterners and Asians for more than a decade, driven by fear the migrants could alter the national identity and culture of Australia for the worse. In a historical sense, Australia’s boat people are seen by many as queue jumpers and unauthorized immigrants—not genuine refugees. . . . Though traditionally seen as a nation of immigrants, Australia has a historical preference for a certain type of immigrant. . . . In 1992 the government . . . introduced a policy of mandatory detention in the wake of an increase in would-be Chinese, Cambodian, and Vietnamese refugees. The policy—which remains today—requires asylum seekers to be held in mandatory detention while they await a decision on their refugee claims or be deported. The law limits the grounds on which Australian courts can hear matters relating to mandatory detention and places no time limit on detention, making detention indefinite, and, according to the Australian Human Rights Commission, effectively exempt from judicial review. (Foulkes 2012)

The containment of asylum seekers in remote compounds and Aboriginal peoples in remote townships—both sectors ostensibly out of sight and mind from the general Australian public and international monitoring—raises a number of

troubling parallels and questions. What are the possible connections between the heavy-handed militarization of the Northern Territory Intervention that clamps down on Aboriginal rights and cordons off remote communities, and the increasingly shrill demands across the political spectrum for patrolling the nation's island borders and incarcerating refugees permanently within the same geographical space of remote outback Australia? These connections were obviously apparent to the Australian federal government when it set up the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs in 2001. This department's specific mandate was to manage both refugee detainment centers and Indigenous affairs. The agency ran between 2001 and 2006, when it was closed down amid controversy for unlawfully detaining a German citizen for ten months and for failing to adequately manage the Woomera immigration detention facility (Whitmont 2003). In hindsight, it may not be coincidental that the year following the closure of the department, the federal government implemented the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act, which institutionalized a new avenue for managing indigenous peoples.

The point I wish to stress is that both Australia's internal policies toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and external policies toward refugees reinforce white paternalism and racial superiority and underscore mainstream society's inability to fully embrace cultural and religious diversity. Moreover, both these policies of political, legal, and economic containment functionally serve to coral certain populations who are often described as unable to work within the standardized norms of white Australian society. Former racialized colonial language—*barbaric, unchristian, lawless*—pepper mainstream and social media about impoverished indigenous communities and detention center inmates. Conveniently, and I would argue not coincidentally, these policies of exclusion speak to what Sassen called a "new logics of expulsion" in that they serve to expel particular sectors of society from participating in the national polity or having access to legal redress and the trappings of democracy.

Returning to ethnicity, inc. and ethnopreneurialism, both internal and external state policies with respect to minority groups shore up the image of an idealized white Australia ringed by empty golden beaches and inhabited by an English-speaking, terrorist-free, tourist-friendly society. Ultimately nationality, inc., trumps ethnicity, inc. in a very real sense—Australia's corporatized national image as expressed through its tourist industry trumps the ethnic entrepreneurialism of indigenous communities. Hence, "world renowned Indigenous artists," as described in the text of a tourist poster, stands in for all Australian Aborigines.<sup>18</sup> This returns us to an earlier discussion about culture-as-resource and George Yúdice's (2003) point that essentialized

cultural differences—be these of nation-states or minority peoples—are now being circulated and mediated through a global political economy.

Packaging indigeneity through a robust national tourist industry underscores the myth of a racially “exotic” yet inclusive multicultural Australian society. It papers over with benign imagery the complex and ongoing oppression of indigenous peoples while at the same time serving the global market of the Australian tourist industry. Complementary to this commodification of internal racism is the ongoing need to deter boats carrying asylum seekers (and supposedly Muslim terrorists) from entering Australian waters as well as to keep under lock and key those refugees who have already landed. In this way both permanent Afghani detainees and impoverished Aboriginal communities share a common future in Australia in that both must be kept out of sight and out of mind under policies of neocolonial management.

### CONCLUSION

In thinking about the costs and contradictions in ethnicity, inc., I have sought to open up discussion to contexts beyond the nation-state in an effort to more fully understand the ramifications of ethnic-entrepreneurialism among local Australian Aboriginal artists and their communities. While a few indigenous artists have profited—economically, culturally, and socially—from the contemporary Indigenous art industry, the long-term successes are not entirely clear. The vast majority of indigenous peoples continue to live in environments of extreme oppression, marginalization, and racism. Of course, one cannot and should not lump all Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into one overarching category, given the very unique kinship identities and the different challenges presented to those living in cities and rural areas in different parts of the country. That being said, the shift toward self-determination and economic, political and cultural revitalization for indigenous peoples that began so promisingly in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s has stalled. The optimism at the time—often associated with the global success of the Aboriginal art industry—has faltered. Australia, like other western nations, is experiencing a cultural backlash against minority peoples both within mainstream society and against those seeking to enter it by way of migration and asylum status.

Around the world, across conventional left and right political lines, the world is experiencing the rise of authoritarian governance and escalating militarization in the name of security. In many cases—in the Middle East, Latin America, Europe, and North America—national governments and state police forces are linking arms with multinational corporations. As a result, there is an

increasing convergence if not equivalency between the logics of the security state and the logics of neoliberalism. In these increasingly narrow domains of concentrated power, how does ethno-entrepreneurialism operate? Who has access to marketing cultural difference? Who controls the terms of ethnobusiness? I have argued that ethnicity, inc. has always been an ambiguous and risky business with no assurance of positive outcomes for its minority participants. However, reading *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009) against today's enormous challenges of global inequality and mass movements of people around the world, the costs of ethnic-capitalism take on a new twist as global economic pressures and political interdependencies sustain the escalation of militarization and security logics. The predominance of militarization, often complemented by the rhetoric of ultra-nationalism, is in turn recasting what is at stake for both nation-states and local communities seeking to capitalize on culture difference. The result in Australia is that asymmetrical power relations between the dominant white settler society and its marginalized indigenous peoples have not been so stark since the times of explicit colonial governance. Against the backdrop of the Northern Territory Intervention, the promise of ethnicity, inc. seems ever more remote.

#### NOTES

1. Ned Resnikoff, "Global Inequality Is a Rising Concern for Elites," Al Jazeera America, November 11, 2014, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/11/11/global-inequalityisarisisingconcernforelites.html>.
2. In 1992, the High Court of Australia recognized in *Mabo v Queensland (No. 2)* that indigenous peoples could hold title over lands and that the common law doctrine of *terra nullius* did not hold. This decision was considered a landmark at the time and gave rise to the Native Title Act (1993). Over the years the courts have interpreted land claims in very limited ways and legally preclude Aboriginal peoples from holding title over their land in ways equal to non-Aboriginal control of landholdings (see Strelein 2010; Smith 2011).
3. "A Brief Aboriginal History," Aboriginal Heritage Office, accessed January 1, 2016, <http://www.aboriginalheritage.org/history/history/>.
4. There are numerous accounts of settlers shooting Aboriginal peoples, such as that told by Bishop Polding in 1845:

I have myself heard a man, educated, and a large proprietor of sheep and cattle, maintain that there was no more harm in shooting a native, than in shooting a wild dog. I have heard it maintained by others that it is the course of Providence, that blacks should disappear before the white, and the sooner the process was carried out the better, for all parties. I fear such opinions



prevail to a great extent. Very recently in the presence of two clergymen, a man of education narrated, as a good thing, that he had been one of a party who had pursued the blacks, in consequence of cattle being rushed by them, and that he was sure that they shot upwards of a hundred.

One of the most dramatic instances of indigenous genocide occurred in Tasmania, a small island lying to the south of the mainland. It is estimated that in 1803, prior to European colonization, approximately three thousand to fifteen thousand Parlevar lived there. However, indigenous communities were very quickly decimated by disease, the kidnapping of native children and adults for labor, and the hunting down of those who fought back. By 1833, only two hundred Aboriginal peoples remained alive. By 1876, Truganini, the last full-blood Aboriginal Tasmanian had died, and parts of her hair and skin were dispersed to the Royal College of Surgeons of England. In other parts of Australia, Aboriginal populations continued to decline dramatically throughout the course of the twentieth century, aided by governmental policies of forced removal of native children, who are now referred to as the Stolen Generations. By 1933 the population is estimated to have fallen to only seventy-four thousand native peoples across the whole of the Australian continent.

5. This became the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (1964–1978).

6. Prior to the 1970s, native art was bought, but these items were not produced intentionally for commercial sale. British colonial settlers were interested in indigenous art and sent back to Europe a range of curios and ceremonial artworks throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The sale of indigenous art was facilitated by many missionaries on the so-called frontier who were keen to show economic development as part of their overall objectives to preserve native traditions and also raise additional funds for their enterprise (Altman 2007).

7. The company is entirely owned and directed by traditional Aboriginal people from the Western Desert, predominantly of the Luritja/Pintupi language groups. It has 49 shareholders and now represents approximately 120 artists.

8. Desart website, <http://desart.com.au/>; ANKAAA (<http://ankaaa.org.au/>) is the peak advocacy and support agency for Aboriginal artists and Art Centres located in the regions of Arnhem Land, Darwin/Katherine, Kimberley and the Tiwi Islands.

9. The Australian government initiated a Senate Inquiry into the unethical practices in the Aboriginal art market in 2006. Installing a code of practice, the government sought to bring a stop to widespread forgeries and accusations of exploitative sweat-shop conditions. The degree to which these actions have been successful is not determined ([https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business)



/Committees/Senate/Environment\_and\_Communications/Completed\_inquiries/2004-07/indigenouarts/report/index).

10. "Contemporary Aboriginal Art in Australia," Japingka Aboriginal Art, <http://www.japingka.com.au/articles/contemporary-aboriginal-art-in-australia/>.

11. I interviewed Judith Ryan, who had been appointed curator of Aboriginal Art at the National Gallery of Victoria, and she informed me that one of the criteria for purchasing indigenous art was that it had to come from a regional community collection since the National Gallery did not buy individual Aboriginal works. Moreover, she said that the National Gallery did not promote individual black artists—a reversed approach from all other contemporary art purchases. This policy no longer stands, but it does reflect prevailing attitudes at the time and the desire to perpetuate cultural difference through specific forms of artistic production and legal exclusion (interview with Judith Ryan, July 8, 1991).

12. The Northern Territory population is 220,000, with more than 35 percent of the population made up of indigenous communities, who technically own half the land mass of the territory.

13. Similar strategies have been used by the Canadian government against First Nations, in what Shiri Pasternak has called "colonial forms of fiscal warfare" implemented through "an army of accountants" (Pasternak 2015).

14. "Vale Michele Harris: A Tireless Campaigner against the NT Intervention," NewMatilda.com, June 3, 2015, <https://newmatilda.com/2015/06/03/vale-michele-harris-tireless-campaigner-against-nt-intervention>.

15. "So began the campaign to discredit the people and to stigmatise Aboriginal men of the Northern Territory publicly. It would be the Minister himself who would take centre stage. It seemed that all Aboriginal men were engaged in paedophilia. The Minister readily gave television and radio interviews, declaring that he knew there were paedophile rings in every Aboriginal community. Viewers were asked during their evening news broadcasts how they felt about Aboriginal children going to bed at night knowing they were not safe. . . . This was a government Minister engaging in a sensationalist campaign aimed at demoralising Aboriginal men and was probably the lowest point in any government behaviour ever seen in Australia's political history. When challenged by the NT Chief Minister to name the people involved, the situation deteriorated further" (Michele Harris, "Striking the Wrong Note," 2015, accessed December 15, 2019, [http://concernedaustralians.com.au/media/Striking\\_the\\_Wrong\\_Note\\_6\\_year\\_NTERT.pdf](http://concernedaustralians.com.au/media/Striking_the_Wrong_Note_6_year_NTERT.pdf)).

16. "Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER)—"The Intervention," accessed October 3, 2015, <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/politics/northern-territory-emergency-response-intervention#ixzz3nSBmoxl5>.

17. Philip Dorling, "Detention Centre Policy Based on Guantanamo," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 14, 2012, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics>

/political-news/detention-centre-policy-based-on-guantanamo-20120313-1uyj7.html.

18. Tourism Australia website, <http://www.tourism.australia.com/>.

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EVE DARIAN-SMITH is Professor and Chair in the Department of Global and International Studies, with affiliated appointments in Anthropology, Law, and Criminology and Law and Society, at the University of California, Irvine. She is author of numerous articles and books including *Bridging Divides: The Channel Tunnel and English Legal Identity in the New Europe*, *Laws and Societies in Global Contexts: Contemporary Approaches*, and *The Global Turn: Theories, Research Designs, and Methods for Global Studies*.

