

Kowal, Emma: *Trapped in the Gap. Doing Good in Indigenous Australia.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2015. 198 pp. ISBN 978-1-78238-604-9. Price: \$ 29.95

In the 1990s, Australian citizens were invited to be part of a decadelong reconciliation process. This legally mandated period was designed so that non-Indigenous peoples or White people (those with British heritage), in particular, could learn about and reflect on the impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples. About two thirds of the way through the decade, as Emma Kowal reminds the readers of her book, a government report was released that outlined the long and extensive history of Indigenous child removal from their families and their transfer to institutions or White families (HREOC, *Bringing Them Home. Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families.* Sydney 1997). For many White people in Australia this was a sharp reminder, or their first recognition, of the serious harm their long-term presence had wrought on Indigenous communities. Further, it was a clear signaling that actions that had been undertaken to help or support Indigenous peoples had often had negative outcomes. This was the case with the child removal policies of the 20th century. Many White people who had been involved in these actions remembered that they had been undertaken with the best of intentions, what became known as “in the best interests of the child” (Link-Up [NSW] and T.J. Wilson, *In the Best Interest of the Child? Stolen Children: Aboriginal Pain / White Shame.* Canberra 1997).

Emma Kowal has undertaken an ethnography of the next generation of White people involved in acting “in the best interest” of Indigenous peoples. A medical doctor as well as a social sciences academic Kowal is reflecting on a group of people and an industry in which she is personally involved – White antiracists in the “contact zone” (the author acknowledges Mary Louise Pratt, 10). Kowal suggests that government approaches to Indigenous/White relations, and specifically approaches designed to solve what are seen as the “problems” in and with Indigenous peoples, have about a 30-year shelf life. The White people involved in the removal of children operated in an assimilationist period, those who took part in the decade of Reconciliation were shaped by a self-determination narrative, and the contemporary workers, that Kowal works with, are caught within an “Intervention” or “Close the Gap” model. As the title of this book suggests, Kowal sees Indigenous and White people as “trapped in the gap.” Focusing on the White antiracists she suggests that the statistical gap between White and Indigenous people’s health and wealth “holds the promise of a future where full citizenship rights can be enjoyed (as such time when the gap is finally closed)” (10). As Kowal goes on to explain that in the worldview that sustains most White antiracists “this statistical gap may also be where the distinctiveness of Indigenous people resides” (10).

Adopting a methodological approach she identifies as “agnosticism” (27), Kowal does not seek to figure out what are good or bad ways of being a White anti-racist professional working in Indigenous health, instead she seeks to understand the subjectivity of this group (32).

She explains it as trying to “understand how dominant subjectivities are formed through mutual recognition with subalterns” (169). To do this Kowal explores the knowledge systems that underpin the daily practice of the dominant group. Here there are links between Kowal’s work and that of scholars such as Elizabeth Povinelli, Tess Lea, and Tim Rowse. This group has explored the ways in which ideas of difference produce particular understandings of what it means to be Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

Kowal also considers the different ways in which Indigenous difference can be framed. She draws on ideas of “remedial difference”; a situation where the difference can be undone and Indigenous people can be brought up to the statistical norm (being as healthy as White people, for example). Remedial is contrasted with the concept of “radical difference” where difference is not something to be “closed” but something that is inherent, ongoing, and perhaps even extreme (35). Mapped onto this pair of concepts is another pair that informs White people’s ideas of Indigenous difference – that of “sanitised” and “unsanitised” difference. “Sanitised” differences are those that are understood by White antiracists as “good” – in particular they are associated with Indigenous spiritual systems, bush skills, and their care of country (38). “Unsanitised” differences are the “bad” ones – the differences that White anti-racists try to minimize in their narratives of indigeneity. These are differences associated with poor eating habits, uncared for housing, and child neglect. In order to pull this group of related concepts together, Kowal introduces her (and her sometimes co-author Y. Paradies’) own idea of “overstructuration,” that is a tendency to downplay agency and to overstate structural issues when explaining Indigenous disadvantage (43).

Armed with this impressive conceptual model, Kowal undertakes her ethnography on her own tribe. As she states, again and again, her aim is not to discover the inadequate or second rate or just “bad” ways that antiracists work, rather she wants to see what are the logical outcomes, the limitations, as well as the productive spaces that emerge as a result of particular knowledge practices. What happens to Indigenous people when White antiracists undertake their work with a worldview based on a sanitized idea of remedial difference between themselves and Indigenous peoples?

Kowal places herself at the centre of this book (in the best possible way). The fieldwork took place in Darwin (Northern Territory) and in chap. 3 she uses the example of research about, attitudes towards, and interactions with “long grassers” (Indigenous people from remote communities who “live [temporarily or permanently] in informal camps around Darwin, drinking alcohol to excess and trying to avoid the authorities who seek to enforce laws” [57]). Kowal uses her significant interactions with members of this community as well as other published research, and different attitudes to the group to make sure the reader has a sense of the complexity of the “dense racial politics of the contact zone” in which she is working (81).

The final three chapters are excellent and engaging, though for another White antiracist, often painful, analyses of professional practices in the field. Of these my fa-

vorite (if this is the correct word) was chap. 4 on the ritual of “Welcome to Country” or “Acknowledgement of Country.” These ceremonies are now integral to universities in Australia and to Humanities and Social Sciences Conferences. The “Welcome to Country” entails a local Indigenous person opening a public event with an official invitation into their “country” (land) often with a promise to safeguard guests while they are there, but mostly with a heartfelt reflection of ancestors and ongoing connection. The “Acknowledgement of Country” is the matching ritual that is offered by non-Indigenous people. I work at a central Sydney University and I know our “Acknowledgement of Country” by heart. As Kowal says, there are real pleasures for some White people in reciting this ritual (87), but also deep anxieties and contradictions. In my case, the Eora people on whose land my university sits were wiped out by smallpox very early in the colonial period. Further, my wealthy university also sits next to one of the most diverse, and perhaps, disadvantaged communities of Indigenous people in Sydney. Kowal’s careful readings of the practices as well as the political, media, and informant commentary on these rituals explain the origins of some of the anxiety that attends to these rituals.

As with Kowal’s informants, I am “trapped in the gap.” This book does not provide a solution that will get me, or anyone else, out of the gap, instead it provides an innovative and extremely thoughtful model that White scholars, professionals, politicians, activists, and anyone else who cares can use to, and I quote Kowal here, “understand the limits and opportunities of our current modes of subjectivity and recognition and to think through the limits and opportunities of the alternatives.” A project like Kowal’s has plenty of critics. It is hard to “agnostically” interrogate a community and a set of practices that are so well meant, especially when you have no solution. Further, there are plenty of critics of critical Whiteness studies, who see the “return” of White people to the academic center stage as a waste of time and energy. I would argue that Kowal’s work is essential to any project that seeks to change or even imagine a different world.

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Laksana, Albertus Bagus: Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Practices. Explorations through Java. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014. 252 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-6396-2. Price: £ 65.00

Die vorliegende Arbeit ist eine verkürzte und überarbeitete Fassung einer Dissertation, die im Jahre 2011 als “Journeying to God in Communion with the Other. A Comparative Theological Study of the Muslim and Catholic Pilgrimage Traditions in South Central Java and Their Contribution to the Catholic Theology of Communion Sanctorum” von der amerikanischen Jesuitenhochschule Boston College angenommen wurde. Der Autor ist ein javanischer Jesuitenpater und der ursprüngliche Titel seines Werkes lässt seine theologischen Absichten deutlich erkennen. Die Katholiken bilden eine kleine Minderheit in Java, wo die überwiegende Mehrheit der Bevölkerung sich zum Islam bekennt. Die römisch-katholische Glau-

bensgemeinschaft ist dabei relativ neu auf Java: Erst mit der Missionierungsarbeit des niederländischen Jesuiten Frans van Lith (1863–1926) ließ sich eine beträchtliche Anzahl von Javanern taufen. Lange Zeit wurde die römisch-katholische Kirche als Fremdkörper empfunden und deshalb ist es den javanischen Katholiken sehr daran gelegen, zu zeigen, dass sie genauso gute Javaner sind wie alle anderen.

Der Autor dieses Buches betont mehrmals, dass sowohl Muslime als auch Katholiken durch die javanische Kultur vereinigt werden. Innerhalb dieser gemeinsamen Kultur unterscheidet er bloß eine “javano-islamische” und eine “javano-katholische” Identität: “these Javanese are arguably authentic Muslims and Catholics. However, they practice Islam and Catholicism respectively, to a large degree, through the lens of a shared Javanese religio-cultural sensibility, a rather deep layer in their selves” (197). Was ist jedoch mit dieser gemeinsamen javanischen Kultur gemeint? Der Autor scheint zu meinen, dass es hierbei um eine uralte Kultur seit grauer Vorzeit geht. Somit kann er den Islam als prägenden Faktor gefällig ausklammern, aber m. E. ist die javanische Kultur kein Abstraktum, sondern wir haben es konkret mit der zeitgenössischen Leitkultur der islamischen Mehrheitsgesellschaft zu tun, an die sich javanische Katholiken weitgehend angepasst haben. So deute ich die Bemerkung des Autors, dass “[i]n the case of south central Java, it is definitely not a mere coincidence that almost each major Marian shrine has its Muslim counterpart nearby, and *vice versa*” (193) als weiteren Beweis dafür, dass die javanischen Katholiken muslimischen Mustern nachgefolgt sind.

Die Gliederung des Buches ist folgendermaßen gestaltet: Im ersten Teil wird in drei Kapiteln die “javano-islamische” Art der Pilgerfahrt behandelt, im zweiten Teil folgt daraufhin, ebenfalls in drei Kapiteln, die “javano-katholische” Perspektive, abgeschlossen mit einer vergleichenden Analyse. Der Autor macht klar, dass es sowohl für islamische als auch katholische Pilger um die Suche nach “Friedlichkeit” (*tentrem*) und “ganzheitlichem Wohlbefinden” (*slamet*) geht (197). Intim vertraut mit javanischen Glaubensvorstellungen weiß der Autor sehr eindrucksvoll zu erklären, wie javanische Pilger beider Konfessionen ihre Praktiken als *laku* oder *tirakat* verstehen, d. h. “an intense period of spiritual cultivation and discernment, done in tandem with the necessary process of ascetic purification of the self” (197). Auch andere javanische Kernbegriffe wie *rasa* (“the deepest intuition and inner sensing”; 40) werden ausführlich und klar verdeutlicht.

Der Autor verbirgt seine eigene Identität nicht, und so ist z. B. zu lesen, dass “the kingship of Christ is becoming a reality at the shrine of Ganjuran” (187). Eine Anekdote über eine islamische Frau, die dort angeblich geheilt worden sein soll, wird als Beweis für “the universality and inclusiveness of the grace of the Sacred Heart” (183) aufgeführt. Dass diese Geschichte auch gerne auf einer großen Feier für Tausende von katholischen Pilgern erzählt wurde, könnte m. E. eher als Beweis für Siegesicherheit (“triumphalism”) gelten. Die eigene Aussage des Autors, dass das Königreich Christi an diesem Ort bereits Wirklichkeit geworden sei, scheint ebenfalls in diese Richtung zu weisen.