Tension of 'Two Worlds': Tradition and Modernity

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The polarity between the disparate spheres of Western modernity and Aboriginal tradition has ultimately prevented the possibility of an Indigenous modernity as Eurocentric and colonial conceptions of progress are not seen to correlate with Aboriginal culture, society and traditions. This chapter extrapolates that an Indigenous modernity is unfeasible through the exploration of the dichotomous relationship between the traditional and the modern. The Eurocentric constructions of contemporaneity and indigeneity as binary opposites is exemplified within Craig Ruddy's (2004) portrait, 'David Gulpilil, Two Worlds', which has been utilised within this paper as a contemporary example of the continued collision the two spheres. This chapter illustrates the paradox of these opposing trajectories through an examination of the historical and contemporary constructions of Aboriginality as divergent from and oppositional to the modern. The reductionist classifications of homogeneity, Otherness, primitivism and ahistoricism are also examined due to the way in which they have disallowed Indigenous peoples from accessing Enlightened notions of progress. The disparity between Aboriginal tradition and modernity is furthered by the processes of Western identity formation which saw the effective establishment of a dichotomous relationship between the 'ancients' and the 'moderns' so that the colonialists could distinguish their progression. The persistence of the polarised constructions of both the modern and traditional as mutually exclusive has essentially denied the possibility of an Indigenous modernity, ensuring that the 'Two Worlds' are not cohesively fused.

Introduction

The possibility of an Indigenous modernity is inextricably linked with the polarised constructions of the spheres of Western modernity and Aboriginal tradition. Eurocentric and colonial conceptions of progress are discursively conceived as discordant with Aboriginal culture, society and traditions, and this dichotomous relationship becomes even more complex when exemplified within a contemporary context. The infeasibility of an 'Indigenous modernity' is epitomised within Craig Ruddy's (2004) portrait, 'David Gulpilil, Two Worlds', which illustrates the collision between the infinite, traditional world of Aboriginal spirituality and culture, and the conformation of modern western civilisation. This chapter examines this polarisation of indigeneity and contemporaneity, and how the paradox of these opposing trajectories is exemplified by the homogenisation of Aboriginality and the characterisation of Indigenous people as traditional, static and ahistorical. The classifications of primitivism and Otherness have also disallowed Indigenous peoples from accessing Enlightened notions of progress. The idea of an Indigenous modernity, therefore, remains an abstraction due to the persistence of the discursive constructions of both the modern and traditional as mutually exclusive.

The denial of an indigenous modernity

In order to effectively comprehend and examine the traditional-modern dichotomy (Gusfield, 1967) and the way in which it prevents the possibility of an Indigenous modernity, it is essential to first understand the specific discursive constructions of modernity and tradition. Western definitions of modernity emphasise the way in which it embodies a "shift from the traditional" (Calhoun, 2002, para.1) pertaining to a strong belief in Enlightened ideas of

"progress and development" (Maplas, 2005, p.33). Kant (1784) emphasised this sense of "emergence from self-imposed immaturity"(p.1) through the expansion of knowledge and the elimination of errors, whilst reinforcing that the non-Western majority of "humanity remains pleasurably in this state of immaturity" (Dussel, 1993, p.68). This Kantian idea of Enlightenment is, therefore, exclusive and it's essentially European origins effectively prevent it from being accessed by those classified as ancient and barbaric, in the context of this study – the Aboriginal Australians.

Dussel's (1993:2000) construction of the 'myth of modernity' effectively exemplifies its Eurocentric nature, as the:

> "Modern European civilisation understands itself as the most developed,
> the superior, civilization. This sense of superiority obliges it, in the form of
> a categorical imperative, as it were, to "develop"(civilize, uplift, educate
> [and categorise]) the more primitive, barbarous, underdeveloped
> civilizations". (Dussel, 1993, p. 75)

Modernity is thus an "exclusively European phenomenon" (Dussel 1993, p.65), inextricably linked to the "faith in the malleability of human nature to achieve ends considered desirable by white Europeans" (Gascoigne, 2002, p.12). This western worldview emphasises a belief in development "from a primitive origin to a utopian end" (Gillen & Gosh, 2007, p.26) and provokes an "ideology of antitraditionalism" (Gusfield, 1967, p.362) which "negates the contents upon which traditional consciousness rests" (Gould, 1970, p.1171). Modernity, therefore, can be seen to directly oppose notions of the traditional and all that it is affiliated with, including Indigenous societies.

Western definitions of tradition, in contrast, concentrate on the "continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm, 1993, p.1) and emphasise the static (Gusfield, 1967; Nash, 2011) nature of cultural, social, and spiritual practices, customs and beliefs. Handler and Linnekin (1984) convey the common modernist perception that "tradition refers to a core of inherited cultural traits whose continuity and boundedness are analogous to that of a natural object" (p.273). This naturalistic model affiliates tradition with "an unchanged situation" (Gusfield, 1967, p.352) and a "consistent body of norms and values" (Gusfield, 1967, p.353) that are conceived to be totally disassociated with the present and seen as completely "preceding" (Gould, 1970, p.1171) the modern. The affiliation of tradition with "long temporal continuity" (Willey & Phillips, 1958, p. 37) as a "bounded entity made up of bounded constituent parts" (Handler & Linnekin, 1984, p.287), effectively enforces a dichotomy between tradition and modernity as "fixed and mutually exclusive states" (Handler & Linnekin, 1984, p.273).

Traditional-modern dichotomy

An examination of the Western constructions of tradition and modernity reiterate that they are fundamentally "different enough from each other to be mutually exclusive" (Gould, 1970, p.1171). Within the linear theory of social change (Gusfield, 1967), they are represented as "radically contradictory" (Rudolph & Rudolph, 1967, p.1) due to the way tradition has been perceived and constructed by those viewing it through the lens of Western modernity. Clifford (2003) claims that tradition is "always a foil to the modern... [and] cannot be transformative or forward-looking" (p.1), and this common Eurocentric perception reinforces the characterisation of the inferiority of traditional societies, or the "traditional owners of the land" (Touma, 2012, paras. 3-6) as contemporary Australians refer to Aboriginal people today. The emphasis on the "unchanging" (Pulleine, 1929, p.310), "antecedent" and

"rudimentary" (Thomas, 1996, p.174) nature of traditional societies explicitly denies Indigenous access to western modernity, assuring that the West remains at the "centre of the discourse of civilisation, colonialism and ultimately modernity" (Russell & McNiven, 1998, p.285).

Gusfield (1967; 1968) emphasises the way in which "tradition and innovation are necessarily in conflict" (1967, p.352) as the "modern present" (1968, p. 5) is divergent from the "traditional past" (1968, p. 5). Through the affiliation of tradition with the past whilst simultaneously classifying Indigenous Australians as 'traditional', it becomes clear that Aboriginal people are being denied access to modernity and notions of progress due to the ideological and linguistic characterisation of the two concepts as divergent and polarised. Aboriginal societies are categorically aligned with the naturalistic paradigm which "presumes boundedness" (Handler & Linnekin, 1984, p.286) due to their strong connections to the past. This, consequently, reinforces the view that they are "ahistorical" (Thomas 1994, p.176) and invariant to change (Hobsbawm, 1993, p.1-3). Aboriginal traditions and notions of progress are, therefore, situated at opposite ends of the "tradition-modernity spectrum" (Gould, 1970, p.1175) due to the "incompatibility between previous and present states of social and cultural being" (Gould, 1970, p. 1175). Aboriginality, conceived as "static, normatively consistent... [and] structurally homogenous" (Gusfield, 1967, p.351), therefore, becomes an antithesis to progress in Western constructions.

This "traditional-modern polarity" (Gusfield, 1967, p.352) is exemplified by Craig Ruddy's portrait, 'David Gulpilil, Two Worlds', which represents the "fierce collision" (Browning, 2009, p. 3) of the two worlds of David Gulpilil and those of Indigenous Australians more broadly – the infinite, traditional world of spirituality, and the materialistic conformation of modern western civilisation (Ruddy 2004). The "exclusiveness" (Gusfield, 1967, p.351) of the two spheres becomes apparent through an understanding of the context of both the painting and the life of Gulpilil. Ruddy, the composer, claims that "David seems to strike a balance... between the two contrasting worlds" (Art Gallery of NSW 2004) and manages to "straddle... [both] western civilisation and Aboriginal Culture" (Sedgman 2004). Ironically, however, Gulpilil's online biography emphasises the "struggles between two worlds" (Adams, 2001, para.4) that he has tackled and continues to face. His personal conflict with alcoholism, depression and the legal system (Adams, 2001, para.5) illustrate his inability to harmonise the two opposing trajectories, and therefore, the portrait installed at the Art Gallery of NSW effectively encapsulates the paradoxical and dichotomous relationship between the traditional and the modern and the fact that, in reality, they cannot be cohesively fused.

Constructions of aboriginality

The polarities between the modern and the traditional are further exemplified through the discursive construction of Aboriginality which effectively prevents the possibility of an Indigenous modernity. The way in which Aboriginality has been historically established is inextricably linked with notions of colonialism as the Eurocentric idea of Indigenous inferiority enabled the hegemonic control by imperial powers and the facilitation of policies such as protectionism, segregation and assimilation. These practices, founded on the basic tenet that Aboriginal peoples, cultures and ways of life were lesser than those of modern societies, and drawing from theories of Eugenics and Social Darwinism, led to the devaluing and subsequent subordination of Aboriginal traditions and cultural identity.
Homogenous Aboriginality and Terra nullius

The establishment of a "homogenous, fixed Aboriginal identity" (Nelson, 2011, p. 6), or as Russel (2011) classifies it, a "pan Australian Aboriginality" (p.2), reinforced a stereotype of the undifferentiated nature of Aboriginal peoples. By reducing and codifying the over three hundred Aboriginal nation states into one, homogenous body the colonialists effectively denied the variance of Indigeneity whilst essentially anchoring Aboriginal communities and traditions in the past. This single stereotype was cultivated and reinforced, thus imbedding within modern conceptions the ideas of Otherness and the unchanging and intransigent nature of this constructed Aboriginality. The Western unification of the Aboriginal communities and cultures and the emphasis on their traditionalism, consequently accentuated the apparent inability for Indigenous people to progress by Western standards. This is also exemplified by the legislative provision of '*terra nullius'*, a land belonging to no-one (Reynolds 1992), which delegitimised Aboriginal traditions, societies and cultural connections to the land as pre-modern. Havemann (2005) asserts that the this legal fiction;

> "justified the territorial acquisition of this content and expropriation of Australia's Indigenous people, denied their personhood, culture and governance systems, and legitimated their exclusion from most benefits of modernisation". (Havemann, 2005, p.57)

The characterisation of the Aboriginal people as embodying features of pre-modernity reinforced the distinction between them and the modern colonialists, thus illustrating the way in which the modern-traditional polarity has manifested throughout history.

Otherness, Inferiority, Primitivism and Barbarism

Influenced by Enlightenment ideas, the colonisation of Australia saw this establishment of "racial stereotypes... invoked to support the colonisation of lands occupied by indigenous people" (Anderson and Perrin, 2008, p147). The dominant colonial discourse emphasised the idea that the native people needed to be "saved from the barbarities of Indigenous community life" (Cunneen, 2007, p. 42) and the conception of their incapacity to "protect and manage themselves" (Aboriginal Protection Act 1869) served to infantilise the Indigenous people and empower ideas of primitivism. Not only did this perceived inferiority enable the justification of colonisation, but it also contributed to the explicit delineation of the Aboriginal people as "the Other" (Bradford, 2001, p.24).

The establishment of a "homogenous, inferior and oppositional view of the Other cultures" (Russell & McNiven, 1998, p.285), effectively attributed an "exemplary status to simple or archaic ways of life" (Thomas, 1996, p.174) and thus reinforced and further validated the negative perception of the traditional. The First Australians were categorised under the "Flora and Fauna Act of NSW" (Pearlman & Gibson, 2007, para.2) and classified as "uncivilised, primitive, barbaric" (Cunneen, 2007, p.42), and "aboriginal or indigenous" (Gillen & Gosh, 2007, p.21), clearly illustrating the way in which they have been denied access to Enlightened notions of progress because of such categorising. Craig Ruddy's portrait exemplifies this stereotype, and the frame of the painting separates the modern responder with the traditional world that Gulpilil embodies. Appearing devoid of western attire with untamed hair, Gulpilil serves as a symbol of the way in which Aboriginality has been constructed (Bradford 2001). The installation also embodies notions of the discourse of Aboriginalism, which was the field of study that necessitated the "teaching, research or display" (Attwood, 1992, p.i) of Aboriginal people by the European expert, who was seen to "know more about Aborigines than they know about themselves" (Attwood, 1992, p.i). In order to understand, dominate and manage the natives, this discourse reinforced the stereotype of the traditional, primitive

Aboriginal, and can be affiliated with the installation as the Western composer captures the individual in order to propagate the image as a standardised, hybrid depiction of Indigeneity. Ahistorical existence - 'The Living Stone Age'

The colonial context also saw the establishment of a "paradigm which held Aborigines to be the living Stone Age" (Russell & McNiven, 1998, p.283). Their traditional way of life and spiritual connection to the land led their existence to be perceived as "ahistorical" (Thomas, 1996, p.176), due to their supposed "inability to change and... incapacity to survive modernity" (Thomas, 1996, p.176). The Western contextual belief in progress and development starkly contrasted with the Indigenous worldviews, and therefore led them to be categorised as people "timelocked in the past, repressed and undeveloped" (Russell 2001, p.13). The strong connection of Aboriginal people with the "ancient land" (Washburn, 2008, p.4) also reinforced their supposed backwardness as Europeans saw agrarianism as regressive, particularly as the Australian landscape appeared, by western standards, to be uncultivated and undomesticated by the native custodians. The common establishment of connections between Aboriginal people and the past, as illustrated by Miles (1854) who cited similarities between the "myths and languages" of "ancient peoples and present Australian Aborigines" (p.12), reinforced the regressive nature of tradition whilst simultaneously validating the modernist paradigm. Perceived as isolated and static entities (Wolf 1982), the Aboriginal people were categorised in a way that enabled the colonialists to depoliticise and dissempower them in the "name of modernity, progress and technological advancement" (Robins, 2003, p. 268). By creating this conception that the first Australians were "savage Palaeolithic survivals from deep antiquity" (Russell & McNiven, 1998, p.294), the colonialists could establish themselves as modern and civilised and reinforce the differences between tradition and innovation.

Ancient and modern dichotomy

The dispossession of the Indigenous Australians and the repossession of their land was "legitimised by constructing an identity of the colonial Self as antithetical... to the colonised Other" (Russell and McNiven, 1998, p.296). This establishment of a discursive polarity between the colonised and the coloniser is inextricably connected with the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, and served as a means of validating and reinforcing the superiority of the modern. The classification of 'the Other' was enforced as a "viable binary opposition to the coloniser, or white man" (Nelson, 2011, p.2), effectively denying an Aboriginal modernity as the Indigenous role in the hierarchal developmental schema was deliberately subordinated in order for the coloniser to define himself. As described by Russell (2001), the "process of locating, objectifying and describing the Other informs and constructs the Euro-Australian self within the Australian context" (p.13). This effectively positions the Indigenous Australian at the 'regressive', 'degenerative' or 'pre-modern' (Thomas 1994) end of the "tradition-modernity spectrum" (Gould, 1970, p.1175) so that the coloniser can assess and distinguish their apparent progression. As the basis of modern philosophy lies in the evolution, development and progression from a "wild savage to rational intellectual" (Pace, 2009, p.1), the categorisation and subordination of the Aboriginal people to the powerless status of 'the Other' was fundamental in the formation of the modern Western identity. It is this essential role and the construction of Indigeneity that prevents the possibility of an Aboriginal modernity, for their fundamental function throughout history has disabled them from progressing beyond the categorisations of traditional, ancient and oppositional to the modern.

Within 'David Gulpilil, Two Worlds', the dichotomous relationship of Indigeneity and modernity manifests itself as both trajectories are explored and presented within the portrait. Ruddy (2004) claims that "the bold, free spirited line work of the charcoal and graphite contrast with the structured and refined opulence of the colonial English wallpaper" (Art Gallery of NSW 2004) which is the canvas, symbolising the nature of Indigenous tradition and spirituality and how it contrasts with the concepts of modernity and white civilisation (Ruddy, 2004). The juxtaposition of the two worlds through artistic devices is emblematic of the way in which the two spheres, in reality, are contradictory and oppositional. Whilst Ruddy claims that David seems to "strike a balance" between the "two contrasting worlds" (Art Gallery of NSW 2004), it is evident within the installation itself that cohesion and harmony are nonviable. Instead, Gulpilil and the broader Indigenous community cannot sustain their "black identity in a white world" (Webb 2004), with Gulpilil himself stating that he has been "born with two legs, my two legs stand in two different worlds.... my country... and white man's world" (PM Radio, 2004). Browning (2009) reiterates that Gulpilil is "planted between two opposing trajectories" and his craving for both "is what he's yet to make peace with". Illustrated within this specific example, emblematic of the broader contemporary context, the contrasting worlds that are western civilisation and Aboriginal culture are clearly distinguished as "diametrically opposed constructions" (Nash, 2009, p. 3) that are not absolutely compatible.

Conclusion

It is clear that historical and contemporary constructions of Aboriginality exemplify the paradoxical relationship between the traditional and the modern, with this dichotomy ultimately denying the possibility of an Indigenous modernity. The way in which Western modernity and Aboriginal tradition have been discursively constructed as binary opposites has effectively meant that the 'Two Worlds' cannot be cohesively fused. The Eurocentric polarisation of indigeneity and contemporaneity is exemplified through the homogenous construction of Aboriginality and the characterisation of Indigenous people as traditional, static and ahistorical. The reductionist classifications of inferiority, Otherness and primitivism have further prevented Indigenous peoples from accessing Enlightened notions of progress. The disparity between the traditional and the modern is furthered by the processes of Western identity formation which saw the effective establishment of a dichotomous relationship between the 'ancients' and the 'moderns' so that the colonialists could distinguish their progression. This polarity is epitomised within Craig Ruddy's portrait, 'David Gulpilil, Two Worlds', which illustrates the continued collision between the spheres of Western modernity and Aboriginal tradition. The Eurocentric construction of Indigeneity has ultimately denied the possibility of an Aboriginal modernity, for the fundamental function of 'the Other' throughout history has prevented Indigenous people from progressing beyond the categorisations of traditional, ancient and oppositional to the modern. The idea of an Indigenous modernity, therefore, remains solely an abstraction for the discursive constructions of the modern the traditional persist as mutually exclusive.

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