

Kowal, Emma. 2015. *Trapped in the gap: doing good in Indigenous Australia*. Oxford: Berghahn Books. 214 pp. Hb.: \$95.00/£60.00. ISBN: 9781782385998.

Well written, widely documented and counter-intuitive, *Trapped in the gap* is a brilliant book and a significant contribution to the study of aboriginal health, racial relations in post-settler states and cultural recognition in a liberal and multicultural society. The book focuses on the study of the culture of what the author calls the 'White anti-racists'. It explores their psychological struggle, their everyday strategies to deny their inability to 'close the gap' and their fear not to 'do-good'. Here, Emma Kowal takes 'an anthropological perspective and consider[s] anti-racist to be a culture, discourse and identity' (p. 11). By doing so, she actually investigates the gap between the promises of late liberal multiculturalism and the experiences of those White anti-racist activists who seek to help Australia's Indigenous minority. At the intersection of anthropology, postcolonial studies and whiteness studies, the book explores current understandings of racial inequality and its consequences for the people, state and public policies. Mainly drawing on Erving Goffman's microsociology, the critical theory of liberal society of Elizabeth Povinelli and her own experience and observations as a 'native ethnographer' (a white person considering herself as an anti-racist studying other White anti-racists), the author ingeniously captures the disturbing irony of those well-meaning 'do gooders', their fears and doubts. She copiously illustrates how, trapped in a morality gap, endless post-settler ambiguities and contradictions, those White anti-racists have a hard time 'doing-good' in Indigenous Australia.

Divided in three main parts and six chapters, the book is successfully

balanced between epistemological considerations, theoretical reflections and empirical illustrations. In the first chapter, Emma Kowal sets up her theoretical framework. Doing so, she examines further some necessary epistemological and ethical issues. Aware of the ethically tendentious subject that she studies and of the wrong interpretation that one could make of it, the author convincingly argues for the necessity of a better understanding of race relations in order to 'identify the limits and opportunities of dominant constructions, and imagine how we might think and act differently' (p. 229).

The second, fifth and sixth chapters are the heart of the book. They focus on the analysis of the 'culture of White anti-racism'. Through her analytical intelligence and subtlety, Emma Kowal examines the psychological perception of the Aboriginal culture that those White, left-wing, middle-class professionals who work in Indigenous health have. She shows how, through the concept of 'remediable difference' (p. 32), they seek to help Aboriginal people to maintain their cultural differences while closing the statistical gap in the public health sector by reasoned interventions. Of course, this cannot be achieved without philosophical and ethical difficulties. As the author brightly demonstrates, White anti-racists feel guilty, stigmatised, trapped in ambiguities and double binds. But, in order to preserve their moral integrity, they develop ethical strategies; wishing to disappear from the medical aid programmes – 'the ultimate endpoint is to be out of a job' (p. 146) – and seeking suffering. Ultimately, those kinds of behaviours can be 'interpreted as manoeuvres to stay within the bounds of the space of recognition or to negotiate its boundaries' (p. 111).

In the third and fourth chapters, the author exemplifies her theoretical propositions. At first, she analyses the problem of race relations between the 'Long Grassers' and White anti-racists in a 'contact zone' (Darwin) to demonstrate 'how the knowledge system held by White anti-racist activists is challenged by the proximity of radically different ways of living' (p. 69). Second, she looks at the numerous political implications of the 'Welcome to Country' ceremonies and what they mean for White anti-racists.

The book is an excellent analysis of the dilemmas of those White, left-wing, middle-class professionals who work in Indigenous health in a post-settler and liberal multiculturalist society. Moreover, Emma Kowal is, through the entire book, scrupulously self-reflexive, self-critical and perfectly aware of the problems and limitations of her research. The only missing piece of this genius academic work are the White anti-racists themselves; direct testimonies and ethnographic observations *per se* are too short in numbers and not visible enough. Except for this small shortcoming, one could say that this book is a great success. It is a meticulous work, based on clever scientific intuitions, and is extremely well written by an experienced anthropologist. It is undoubtedly a must-read book for anyone who seeks to better understand the problems of Indigenous health and racial relations in contemporary Australia.

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Laplantine, François. 2015. *The life of the senses. Introduction to a modal anthropology*. London: Bloomsbury. 208 pp. Pb.: £17.99. ISBN: 9781472522382.

The first book of the Sensory Studies series published by Bloomsbury, *The*

life of the senses is an inspiring work by François Laplantine about sensory thinking and the value for anthropologists of practising sensory ethnography. Following the growing field of Sensory Studies, the author gives a fine account of what he defines as modal anthropology, which is sensible to the plurality of bodily action and attentive to the duration and temporal flow of experiences. Throughout the book, the reader recognises the importance of a sensory approach to the social as well as the usefulness of the senses as mediating the production of knowledge in anthropology.

Chapter 1 opens with a reflection on *gingar*, a particularly Brazilian way of walking that consists of a sinuous way of swaying all parts of the body, especially the legs, the hips, the shoulders and the head. *Gingar* is at the basis of different Brazilian bodily languages, such as *umbigada* and samba, the choreography of *Candomblé*, and the swinging sonorities of bossa nova. As a style of behaviour, *gingar* is central to the *malandro's* (hustler's) art of getting by, and it also informs the oscillating movements of defence and attack in Capoeira. The art of *gingar* shows how the physical and the sensible are inseparable as ways of knowing and experiencing the body in its historicity, its ability to transform itself during time and its living modalities.

A modal anthropology aims to renovate our approach to the social through an eye informed by a choreographic model of thought. Such an eye is able to discard dichotomies such as intelligible and sensible, cognition and emotion. Instead, it is sensible to the rhythms and temporalities of social life (chapters 2 and 3). Chapter 4 guides our attention to the gestures and sonorities of people's actions and behaviours, encouraging anthropologists to give