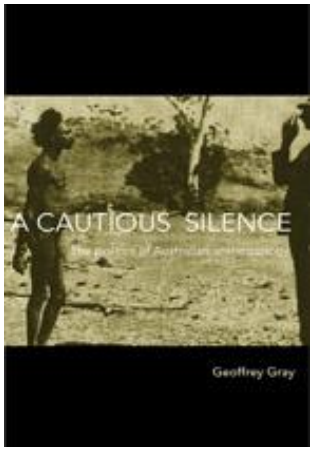
A Cautious Silence: The Politics of Australian Anthropology by Geoffrey Gray. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007, pp. ix + 293, AUD $39.95, Paperback ISBN: 9780855755515.



In the closing chapter of *A Cautious Silence* Geoffrey Gray observes that in its early days the practice of social anthropology in Australia was mostly complicit 'in the oppression of colonised peoples underwritten by its emphasis on advising colonial administrators in controlling and developing colonised people' (p. 227). Along with the personal and professional relationships of various anthropologists with research funding bodies (notably the Australian National Research Council) fellow academics, government, missionaries and civilians, and the 'cautious silence' (p. 113) adopted or not adopted by some anthropologists about the mistreatment of Aborigines they witnessed, this constitutes the theme of this intriguing history, roughly covering from 1914 to 1947. Gray's study is based on a close reading and interpretation of archival sources from the University of Sydney archives, ANRC papers, and many surviving personal papers, supplemented by personal interviews with practitioners. Much of the material has not previously seen the light of day.

He begins with the establishment of the Chair of Anthropology at Sydney University in 1914, surveying the difficulties in getting funding from Governments and research foundations. Grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and later, the Carnegie Foundation were administered on the Department's behalf by the ANRC, an arrangement which in the case of the Rockefeller Foundation led to financial chaos and loss of reputation for some researchers when the then secretary of the ANRC, Henry G. Chapman, embezzled funds over many years. The embezzlement was not revealed until after Chapman's suicide in 1934.

A great deal of the book revolves around the relationships between the various holders of that Chair — A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Raymond Firth, and most notably A.P. Elkin — and the graduates they supervised. All of these professorial luminaries believed Aborigines were a doomed race, or, as Elkin put it, ethnology 'must help the higher races to give to the lower those elements of culture which would enable them to rise in the scale' (p. 93). The professors and their acolytes were in no doubt that the role of anthropology was to assist Government in the understanding and controlling of native peoples both in Australia and Papua and New Guinea. This latter view was not necessarily shared by every one of the students.

The work's central section deals primarily with the experiences of diploma and graduate researchers in Papua New Guinea, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Queensland, and South Australia. Gray delves into the early careers of better known anthropologists such as W.E.H. Stanner, the Berndts and several others, and their interactions with Aborigines, missionaries, Protectors and various white communities. The main concentration is on those who kept silent about Aboriginal mistreatment and those who did not. Researchers were not supposed to talk 'against the Government and

the Mission' (p. 89). To do so almost invariably led to refusal of further research funding, and the end of one's career.

As the only anthropologists working in the field during the Second World War, the Berndts were a special case. Ronald Berndt faced deep suspicion from the South Australian Aborigines' Protection Board after he and Catherine Berndt offended the authorities and the missions by presenting to the local Anthropological Society a paper critical of the practice of 'half-castes [being] taken away from their homes' (p. 155) and of attempts to prevent Aboriginal contact with workers on the proposed Transnational Railway. Berndt was slurred because of his German ancestry and accused of disloyalty and attempting to avoid military service. The Berndts were effectively banned from researching in South Australia, despite Elkin's continued support.

Elkin would face much more serious problems during the war. The primacy of Sydney University's Anthropological Department was challenged by the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs, led by the charismatic and eccentric Alf Conlon, particularly in Papua and New Guinea, where it advocated 'a break with pre-war policy and practice' (p.185) in accordance with the Atlantic Charter. Similarly, the establishment of the Australian Pacific Research Council and the like immediately after the war, also under the aegis of Conlon, threatened 'Elkin's authority and academic hegemony' (p. 191). Elkin failed to enlist government support and was pushed to the margins, his influence virtually at an end, apart from a brief flurry during the Guided Projectiles Project.

Gray's book is an enthralling history of the origins and permutations of an academic discipline in Australia, which also greatly enlightens us about Aboriginal-White relations in the early to mid twentieth century. It is a rich and complex work.

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