

## VIII. Positioning Carl Strehlow in Australian Anthropology and Intellectual History

Histories of Australian anthropology have had an overwhelmingly Anglophone focus rendering invisible the contribution of the German humanistic tradition. In this chapter I will make some suggestions as to how Carl Strehlow's work might be positioned in Australian anthropology and the implications of this for a re-assessment of the work of Spencer and Gillen and T.G.H. Strehlow as well as the history of the discipline more generally.

Old texts or ideas can become the object of current debate and reflection in a discipline (Langham 1981: xxii). Carl Strehlow's text, for instance, suggests new forms of reflection on contemporary Australian anthropology and especially on the way in which professionalism can promote research but also narrow the history of a discipline. There are other early ethnographic writers including W. Ridley, A.H. Howitt, R.H. Mathews, K. Langloh Parker and W.E. Roth from whom new insight might be gained concerning how anthropology was shaped specifically in Australia across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using translations both from French and German, Martin Thomas (2007, 2011) has made an impressive start on the work of R.H. Mathews. His tracing of the linguistic journey involved in the publication of Mathews' work, suggests that Australian anthropology then may have been more cosmopolitan than it is today. Chris Nobbs' 'The Bush Missionary's Defence' (Nobbs 2005: 26–53) on missionary Otto Siebert makes a start on showing underlying premises that lie outside an Anglophone tradition of a modern anthropology and its field method. Once again, there is more than one route to an empirical discipline. Silverman (2005) suggests national anthropologies should be aiming towards a cosmopolitan discipline and Austin-Broos (1999: 215) proposes that to engage with anthropology's maturing path in the course of the twentieth century, it is paramount in the Australian context to consider traditions outside of a British-Australian intellectual world, that takes the psychological and hermeneutic traditions of European anthropologies into account.

There are two forms of mainly Australian writing that frame Carl Strehlow's work. The first are comments, sketches and longer studies contemporaneous with *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* and produced by others interested in or engaged with Aboriginal people. These writings provide a further important background to *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien*. To ultimately place his work in perspective, and the work of Spencer and Gillen, it is important to compare and contrast what they achieved

with other writers of the time. The focus should not be just on the 'armchair' anthropologists of Europe and Great Britain but also on the diarists, chroniclers and policeman-scribblers who shaped popular attitudes to Aboriginal people. It may have been some of the work of this latter group that most influenced settler society in its view of indigenous Australians. It is in comparison with this work that Australia's transitional ethnographers need to be judged, for what they achieved in a nascent science rather than for ways in which they fell short of a modern anthropology. A history of how anthropology in Australia enlightened its readers, rather than reinforced colonial prejudice, is still to be written, although Hiatt's *Arguments about Aborigines* (1996) makes a start.

The second set of literature I will address are some relevant discussions in the history of Australian anthropology that bear on my study of *The Aranda's Pepa* and also differ from it. This book is unusual to the extent that it focuses only on one major text, in this case of a missionary-scholar. It is the unique circumstance of Carl Strehlow's work, largely forgotten in Germany and hardly known in Australia, that led me to this particular focus especially when I discovered the von Leonhardi correspondence at the Strehlow Research Centre in Alice Springs. It seemed a fitting redress for Carl Strehlow's opus. The contemporary writings that correspond most directly with this study are those by John Mulvaney and his co-authors and co-editors in their works on both Spencer and Gillen. Although these are not the only writings on a transitional figure in Australian anthropology, they are certainly the most important. Possibly, the other major work to consider beside these is Ian Langham's study of 'the "school" of Cambridge Ethnology' in which the roles of W.H.R. Rivers and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown are central (Langham 1981: xxiii). His approach was influenced by George Stocking's mode of writing about anthropology, which he usefully applied to early Australian anthropology.

## Early contemporaneous work

In the 1860s and early 1870s J.M. Stuart (1865), W.C. Gosse (1873), P.E. Warburton (1875), E. Giles (1889), and other explorers, recorded the presence of Aboriginal people in central Australia by making some occasional remarks on brief encounters and indigenous terms. These accounts were followed by a number of books with contributions from a variety of people including surveyors, missionaries, policemen and telegraph masters. Examples of this genre which often came in the form of collations, are: R.B. Smyth's *The Aborigines of Victoria with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania* (1878), G. Taplin's *The Folklore, Manners, Customs and Languages of the South Australian Aborigines* (1879), J.D. Woods' *The Native Tribes of South Australia* (1879) and E.M. Curr's *The Australasian Race* (1886–

1887). These collections cover subjects such as the origin of the Australian race, their languages (usually wordlists and occasionally skeletal grammars) and their 'customs, manners and habits' in general. 'Ethnographic' writing by troopers, such as Gason (1874) and Willshire (1888), were also published.

Samuel Gason, a mounted constable of the South Australian police force was stationed at Lake Hope in the early 1870s, and took an interest in the Diyari people of the region collecting ethnographic data on their social and religious life. In 1874 he published *The Dieyerie Tribe of Australian Aborigines*; in the same year he led punitive expeditions near Barrow Creek on Kaytetye country (Nettelbeck and Foster 2007: 7). In 1888 William Willshire's *The Aborigines of Central Australia* appeared, which, according to Nettelbeck and Foster, 'is more tellingly a literary reconstruction of his experience and opinions as a Mounted Constable in the Interior' than an account of the 'manners, customs and languages' (Nettelbeck and Foster 2007: 53).

Also noteworthy are Thomas Worsnop's *The Prehistoric Arts, Manufactures, Works, Weapons, etc., of the Aborigines of Australia* (1897), a survey of Aboriginal art and material culture, and John Mathew's *Eaglehawk and Crow* (1899). Mathew attached special importance to his linguistic studies and was interested in diffusionist thought. His data seemed to indicate that the distribution of language proved that settlement of the continent was first in the north-east where the lines of language converged and not, as was put forward in an earlier hypothesis by Eyre and endorsed by Curr, that the first settlement was in the north-west, and that the distribution of population was effected by the original stream of people crossing to the south of Australia in three broad separate bands (Mathew 1899: ix–xi).

W.E. Roth, Oxford educated, published in 1897 *Ethnological Studies among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*, a classic in Australian anthropology. Roth was a surgeon working in Boulia, Cloncurry and Normanton, where he made his own empirical investigations into the languages and traditions of the Aboriginal people of North-West-Central Queensland. He concluded that 'his tribes lacked any totemic beliefs, a finding which Spencer condemned as heresy' (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 209). Spencer set out to demonstrate its falsity and made derogatory remarks about Roth, as he did about R.H. Mathews (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 195; Thomas 2004, 2011).

Like other Australian ethnographic writers of the time, R.H. Mathews (1841–1918) was a self-taught anthropologist. Between 1893 and 1918, he published 171 anthropological reportages in English, French and German (Thomas 2007). Some of it was based on his own observations, but like most of his contemporaries, he also had to rely on the information supplied by others through correspondence. Among his prolific writings were a number of articles on Aranda people

(Mathews 1906, 1907a,b,c, 1908) although he never visited central Australia and seemed to base his accounts at least in part on his letter exchange with Carl Strehlow.

E. Eylmann (1860–1926), a German doctor and adventurer, also had contact with Strehlow. In 1908 he published *Die Eingeborenen der Kolonie Südaustralien*. During his travels in remote Australia, he had been a guest of Carl Strehlow at Hermannsburg Mission in 1898. His account contains some interesting ethnographic and historical data on Aboriginal Australia as well as an ungracious account of the Lutheran missions of the inland (Eylmann 1908: 464–482) who had been his hosts. Monteath (2013) writes that Eylmann stood in the camp of the anti-humanists who were also well represented amongst Germans, and that his views differed fundamentally from those of the German missionary anthropologists, above all Carl Strehlow.

In the 1860s with a stream of Protestant missionaries arriving in the Lake Eyre region the Diyari language and culture received a great deal of attention. One of the first missionaries at Killalpaninna Mission, Carl Schoknecht, wrote a Diyari grammar and wordlist within two years of his arrival (Schoknecht 1997: 16, 80). His successors continued to collect data on the Diyari language and culture until the mission was closed in 1917 (see Kneebone 2001; Stevens 1994). The Lutheran ethnographers of this region are fairly well-known today. Among these, missionaries Siebert and Reuther made outstanding contributions (Völker 2001; Hercus and McCaul 2004; Nobbs 2005). Reuther left a monumental work behind called *Die Diari*. It remains unpublished despite Tindale's efforts. In 1902 Siebert co-authored with M.E.B. Howitt 'Some Native Legends from Central Australia' in *Folklore* and in 1910 his article 'Sagen und Sitten der Dieri und Nachbarstämme in Zentral-Australien' was published in *Globus* with the help of von Leonhardi (Völker 2001). Siebert's unpublished correspondence with Howitt remains a valuable source for the cultures of the Cooper Creek area (see Hercus and McCaul 2004; Nobbs 2005). However, others also made records of the Diyari. A.W. Howitt who had corresponded with S. Gason between 1879 and 1888 published 'The Dieri and other kindred Tribes of Central Australia' in 1891, which according to Nobbs (2007: 3), is the first comprehensive ethnography about Aboriginal people in the Cooper Creek region.

However, among Aboriginal peoples in central Australia and in Australian anthropology generally, the Aranda are now one of the best-documented Aboriginal groups. The Aranda, as John Morton remarks, 'need no introduction' as they and their first significant ethnographers, Spencer and Gillen, were propelled around the 1900s to international celebrity (Morton 1985: 3) and are one of the 'best-known Aboriginal groups in world anthropology' (Morton 1992: 24; see also McKnight 1990). Their ethnographers and anthropologists are among the finest.

The documentation of Aranda culture began when the first Lutheran missionaries, A.H. Kempe, L. Schulze and W.F. Schwarz, arrived in 1877 at the site of Ntaria in central Australia where they set up the Lutheran mission. As soon as they had made first contacts with the indigenous population, they started to study the language of the local people and collected material on their customs. By 1880–1881 they had produced a school primer and a book with bible stories, psalms, hymns and prayers in the local language. In 1883 Kempe published his first ethnographic account of the ‘Aldolinga’, as the people he had met at Ntaria called themselves, ‘Zur Sittenkunde der Centralaustralischen Schwarzen’. In 1886 and 1887, F.E.H. Krichauff published ‘Customs, Religious Ceremonies, etc., of the “Aldolinga” or “Mbenderinga” Tribe of Aborigines of the Krichauff Ranges’, which was based on data collected by Kempe and Schulze. By the time these missionaries left Hermannsburg Mission in the early 1890s they had also published ‘A grammar and vocabulary of the language spoken by the Aborigines of the MacDonnell Ranges’ (Kempe 1891) and ‘The Aborigines of the Upper and Middle Finke River: their habits and customs’ (Schulze 1891). Schulze had also corresponded with Howitt.<sup>1</sup>

After these early anthropological accounts on Aranda people and language by the German missionaries, they became the subject of scientific research during the Horn Scientific Expedition of 1894. E.C. Stirling, the expedition’s anthropologist and the director of the South Australian Museum, collected ethnographic data principally on the ‘Arunta’ (Stirling 1896: 9) which was published as the fourth volume, *Anthropology*, in the expedition’s report. This volume also contains a piece on Aboriginal beliefs by Frank Gillen. Baldwin Spencer, the expedition’s zoologist and editor of the reports, made some remarks on the Aboriginal people he had encountered in central Australia, which includes Gillen’s famous coining of ‘alcheringa’ as the ‘dreamtime’ (Spencer 1896: 111). Gillen’s contribution was not his first anthropological or linguistic attempt. Previously, he had collected wordlists, and one of them had been published in Curr’s third volume of *The Australasian Race* in 1886. He had also made field notes, some of which were published posthumously (Gillen 1968, 1995).

Based on the observation of ceremonial cycles performed in 1896 for a number of weeks at the Alice Springs telegraph station, and Gillen’s previous and subsequent field research, Spencer and Gillen’s first classic *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* appeared in 1899. It was followed by *The Northern Tribes of Central Australia* in 1904 which was the result of a long fieldtrip from Alice Springs north along the Telegraph Line in 1901. One year earlier Gillen read and published a Frazerian paper, called *Magic amongst the Natives of Central Australia* in Melbourne which Spencer had written (Morphy [1997] 2001: 28). Their work was ‘in no small measure sponsored’ (Morton 1985: 12) and mentored by James

1 Schulze’s letters to A.W. Howitt, 1887–1889 (State Library of Victoria, Howitt Papers MF 459, Box 1051/1cc).

Frazer (Marett and Penniman 1932). These books address both physical and social aspects of Aboriginal people, but focus on totemic beliefs and ceremonial practices. After Gillen's death in 1912, Spencer continued publishing and his oeuvre amounted to several more books and reports on Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory, culminating just before his death in two volumes called *The Arunta* (1927), which included Gillen as co-author.

Another anthropological classic called *The Native Tribes of South-East Australia* by A.W. Howitt (1830–1908) was published in 1904. It was based on his field-data and the data of dozens of others with whom he corresponded. In 1873 he had joined 'Dr Lorimer Fison in investigating the classificatory system of relationships, which obtains among these savages' (Howitt 1904: vii). Their results had been published in *Kamilaroi and Kurnai: Group Marriage and Relationship, and Marriage by Elopement* in 1880 and 'From Mother-right to Father-right' in 1883 and were indebted to Morgan's approach to kinship studies. These publications which were concerned with origins of group-marriage maintained they had found evidence for the practice, which, according to Hiatt, belongs to 'one of the most notable fantasies in the history of anthropology' (Hiatt 1996: 56). Howitt understood wife-sharing between two brothers as group marriage, evident in a practice called *pirrauru*, by which an older brother granted access to his wife to a younger brother. In 1899 Spencer and Gillen reported a similar institution among the Urabunna giving Howitt's finding powerful backing. However, Malinowski would seal the fate of group marriage in 1913 with his *The Family among the Australian Aborigines* that showed that Howitt and Spencer's theoretical loyalties had led them to distort the facts of Aboriginal family life (Hiatt 1996: 45, 51).

Earlier in 1906 N.W. Thomas had taken issue with the existence of group marriage in *Kinship Organisations and Group Marriage in Australia*, a summary of the existing Australian material on kinship study (Thomas 1906a: 123; Hiatt 1996: 46–47). Generally N.W. Thomas belonged to those who did not accept many of the assumptions generated by evolutionistic thinking. He commented on Australian anthropology in German and English journals. In 1905, for example, he wrote 'Über Kulturkreise in Australien' in the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* and in 1906 'Dr. Howitt's Defence of Group-Marriage' in *Folklore*. In the same year he also published *Natives of Australia*, a summary of the existing literature on the Aborigines of Australia, and an article called 'The Religious Ideas of the Arunta'. These works were literature based and relied on information obtained from people in the field. For example, Thomas corresponded briefly with Carl Strehlow asking him to fill in some gaps left by Spencer and Gillen's publications.<sup>2</sup>

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2 See for example N.W. Thomas to Carl Strehlow, 22.10.1904 (SRC 1904/39) and 27.4.1905 (SRC 1905/58).

Andrew Lang, another armchair anthropologist, also rejected the idea of group marriage that led him to an interest in K. Langloh Parker's work. In the foreword of her book *The Euahlayi Tribe: A Study of Aboriginal Life in Australia* (1905), he remarked that she had *not* found the custom 'by which married men and women, and unmarried men, of the classes which may intermarry, are solemnly allotted to each other as more or less permanent paramours' (Lang 1905: xi). He also took the opportunity to hint that Parker's collections of certain beliefs might be styled as 'religious'.

Some press notices of K. Langloh Parker's earlier compilations of folklore, *Australian Legendary Tales* and *More Australian Legendary Tales*, remark that 'the wild man of that land deserve to occupy a somewhat higher position in the scale of intelligence than that which is generally attributed to them' and that 'The poetic and imaginative quality of these tales will surprise readers who are chiefly impressed by the savagery and the degraded condition of the Australian blacks' (advertising space in Mathew's *Eaglehawk and Crow* 1899).

A number of English intellectuals were sceptical about the wide-sweeping generalisations made by the evolutionists, who were often lawyers or natural scientists. The literature generated by people with clerical or humanistic backgrounds tended to avoid the sweeping generalisations of natural scientists and focused more on specific cultures and groups. But as natural science was the dominant paradigm and a new era seemed to be dawning, it dominated mainstream thinking – not least because it delivered some readily understandable generalisations such as progressive moves from 'magic, religion to science' that were attractive to the Victorian mind (see Stocking 1987, 1995).

## Historical writing on transitional Australian anthropology (c.1890–1920)

Without doubt the most impressive corpus of commentary to consider in relation to Carl Strehlow's work is the body of work produced by John Mulvaney and his associates that celebrates the life of Baldwin Spencer and, to a lesser degree, that of Frank Gillen. These works include Mulvaney and Calaby's biography of Baldwin Spencer, not only as anthropologist but also as biologist, public man of letters and administrator (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985). This corpus includes the collection of Baldwin Spencer's photographs selected and annotated by Geoffrey Walker and edited by Ron Vanderwal to which Mulvaney wrote an introduction (Walker and Vanderwal 1982). Interestingly, a second edition of Spencer's photographs, this time edited by Philip Batty, Lindy Allen and John Morton was produced in 2005. It reflects the impact of historical perspectives in anthropology and a consequent effort in the selection to underline both the

specificity of Aboriginal people, especially in their ritual life, and the colonial context in which Spencer took his photographs. For example, the second edition includes photographs of body decoration and ritual acts not included in the earlier selection, and photographs of living conditions, on the fringe of Darwin, for instance, that help contextualise Spencer's other images.

In his introduction to the first collection of Baldwin Spencer's photographs, Mulvaney canvases the view of Spencer that he, and Howard Morphy in particular, would develop in their later work. The latter involved editing the correspondence of Gillen to Spencer and also other outback correspondence with Spencer especially from Constable Ernest Cowle who resided for some time south of Hermannsburg at Illamurta (see Mulvaney, Morphy and Petch [1997] 2001; Mulvaney, Petch and Morphy 2000). While neither Mulvaney nor Morphy deny Spencer's strong evolutionary views, they tend to give them less weight by emphasising their data collection through fieldwork that was the product of the Gillen-Spencer partnership. Mulvaney sums up Spencer's evolutionary position quite precisely:

Spencer believed that biological evolution went along with mental development and material progress. He conceived of Aborigines as surviving fossil remnants from the remote past, whose social and belief systems reflected this pristine condition. (Mulvaney 1982: x)

At the same time, Mulvaney observes that Spencer was a 'generous' man who attended to the 'individuality' of his indigenous photographic subjects. He underlines that Spencer and Gillen's research, due to its density, can be revisited and has been by other anthropologists. Morphy goes further to propose that the partnership of Spencer and Gillen involved an example of the newly emerging 'fieldworker theorist' with one particular twist: '[R]ather than being combined in a single person [the fusion results from] their separate identities in joint research and co-authorship' (Morphy [1997] 2001: 43). Morphy seems to suggest that by over-emphasising Spencer's evolutionary concerns, the partnership has been done an injustice in histories of social anthropology (Morphy [1997] 2001: 30, 46). As a consequence, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski have been given more prominence than Spencer and Gillen as trail-blazers of modern fieldwork and the ethnographic method. Morphy seems to propose that 'theory' in this work ultimately has been less important than the actual data, and he also seems to give Baldwin Spencer equal credit with Frank Gillen for the production of that data in *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*.

This argument is difficult to sustain when it is juxtaposed with Philip Jones's preliminary research on the relative ethnographic contributions of Gillen and Spencer to *The Native Tribes of Central Australia*. His examination of correspondence and text reveals that, notwithstanding Gillen's

acknowledgements of Spencer, the latter more often acted as editor than as original contributor to the work. In addition, many of the original photographs in their first publication were Gillen's rather than Spencer's (see Jones 2005). If Spencer was mainly the theorist in this fieldwork-theorist fusion, then his contribution to this partnership needs to be carefully re-assessed for, as Mulvaney indicates, his theory was a radical evolutionary type that would soon be superseded by others.

Notable in these discussions is the absence of any sustained attempt to assess the impact of Spencer's evolutionism on the ethnography and interpretations that the pair produced, whether it be their views on conception (but see Wolfe 1999), the controversy about *altjira* and the presence or absence of a high god, or their views on the inheritance of totems. Morphy ([1997] 2001, 2012) focuses mainly on the production of fieldwork data *per se* and Mulvaney in his biography of Spencer, authored with Calaby, addresses a host of activities well beyond anthropology (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985), which included some foundational ideas and projects for future assimilation policies (Ganter 2005: 124–129). However, Mulvaney and Calaby do suggest that the feuding relation between 'Spencer and the Lutheran authorities' was regrettable and detrimental to the advancement of anthropological research in Australia and that Gillen's view of Strehlow contributed to Spencer's attitudes towards the Lutherans (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 391). Mulvaney and Calaby remark:

The fact that Strehlow was to publish significant studies of Aranda religion, the only other major anthropology of this area, was to compound the rancour which developed between Spencer and the Lutheran authorities, for they conflict with his own interpretations. (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 124)

Furthermore, the biographers also suggest that whatever his critiques of the Christian Strehlow, Spencer's own research methods were by no means beyond reproach. They note that in Spencer's *The Arunta* (1927), he virtually claims a 'monopoly of knowledge':

He [Spencer] disposed of Strehlow's conflicting evidence as unreliable, because his informants were not "unspoilt" by culture contact, whereas he assumed that Gillen's elders were authentic "primitives". He felt confident that no future anthropologist "will ever be able" to add anything substantial to the Arunta testament according to Spencer and Gillen. Their record provided "as much insight as we are now ever likely to gain into the manner of life of men and women who have long since disappeared in other parts of the world". However, because their traditional informants were now dead, he had the comforting sense that their veracity was unassailable. This was, however, a sad reflection on his

conception of scientific research method in anthropology. He disparaged Strehlow's informants, but his own were safely beyond questioning in this world. In this sense, Spencer was the classic example of the proprietorial anthropologist, who claimed a people as "his." (Mulvaney and Calaby 1985: 379)

Morphy proposes that it does 'not matter what Spencer and Gillen labelled Arrernte rituals and ceremonies – whether they classified them as religious or magical practices' (Morphy [1997] 2001: 37). This underestimates a powerful underlying framework in both academic and popular life that, in Australia, has treated indigenous practices and belief as survivals of an earlier time, and thereby with contempt.

Austin-Broos has argued that although 'Gillen's knowledge of the marriage system and churinga led him beyond the issues of primitive promiscuity and totemic cannibalism as they had been posed by Baldwin Spencer', Gillen failed nonetheless to formulate either anthropological or historical questions to replace 'these spurious evolutionary ones' (Austin-Broos 1999: 210–211). Thus, she argues, it is 'inappropriate to compare, as Morphy does, Gillen's historical interests with the interests of anthropologists today in their discussions of myth and historical transformations' (Austin-Broos 1999: 211). Rumsey also questions Morphy's claims for Spencer and Gillen. Morphy argues that some of their 'key concepts', 'the network of ancestral tracks that intersect the landscape', actually specified an Aboriginal ontology (see Morphy [1997] 2001: 37). In reply, Rumsey showed that 'the centrality of place in the people-totem-place nexus' was a theme that Spencer and Gillen did not even closely apprehend (Rumsey 2001: 42). These views suggest that the advances of theory in conjunction with ethnography that Morphy imputes to Spencer and Gillen would only emerge some decades later as a professional anthropology developed. Once again, this is not to diminish the achievements of Spencer and Gillen as early field anthropologists of central Australia, but rather to locate them appropriately in terms of subsequent as well as previous work.

Beyond the status of their field research, it is Spencer and Gillen's influence on public and political life that makes them a difficult case. It seems clear that they had a major impact on public opinion that shaped negative views of Aboriginal Australians (Mulvaney [1997] 2001: 9; Ganter 2005). In the context of this opinion, functionalism for all its limitations was critical and almost revolutionary. In arguing that all the elements of a people's practice and belief are 'functional' in the present, it eschewed the evolutionary assumption of lower level survivals from the past in a superior present. As Morphy remarks, Spencer and Gillen were 'by no means embryonic functionalists' (Morphy [1997] 2001: 50). They belonged to a Victorian past that subscribed to evolutionism; one that W.H.R. Rivers, Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski had to reject as they

developed the discipline. Therefore it is fair to conclude that their work, like Strehlow's as well, requires very careful and dispassionate treatment concerning both its strengths and its limitations. Few would argue with the view that both Christianity *and* social Darwinism can impair ethnography (Austin-Broos 1999: 214). Carl Strehlow and Baldwin Spencer each instituted a different way of looking at Aboriginal futures. Overall for the Lutherans, the idea was adaptation to the new circumstances if not assimilation; and for Spencer and the like, reserves, where Aboriginal people could remain much as they always had been and 'humanely' die out. Both ideas were highly problematic. Nonetheless, the idea that Aboriginal people could not or should not have engaged with the new world that was clearly overtaking them was fundamentally flawed.

As Mulvaney and Calaby indicate, and as Hiatt (1996) confirmed, these types of anthropological debate have continued throughout the twentieth century. Teasing out the real value of works that have been tainted by their own times cannot be done by 'exonerating accounts', critiques of other researchers who might have incorrectly read something into it, textual analysis, or a personal, purposive or interpretive reading of early ethnographic texts (see for instance Morphy 2012: 545–560). Indeed, it does not do these texts justice. Forms of work are needed that integrate personal and institutional agendas with the particular intellectual issues and debates that engaged practitioners and shaped anthropology. Intellectual biographies that address the anthropology produced by these early writers furthers our understanding of ongoing issues in modern anthropology and helps to identify the shadows of early paradigms in contemporary thought. Austin-Broos (1999: 215) writes, for example, that a 'thorough assessment of Baldwin Spencer would require at least a careful comparison of his work with that of W.H.R. Rivers and Franz Boas, in addition to a comparative assessment of Frank Gillen's regional ethnographic achievements'. In this light R.H. Mathews' work on Bora type initiation ceremonies should also be carefully examined (Mathews 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897). It appears likely that Mathews' extensive work on these matters influenced Spencer. For example, Spencer had 'communicated' in 1896, Mathews' paper on 'The Bora of the Kamilaroi' (Mathews 1897: 137–173), to the Royal Society of Victoria just before he left for his fieldwork on central Australian ceremonies in 1896.

In his account of the early "'school" of Cambridge Ethnology', Langham (1981) analyses a range of work conducted mainly in Oceania and the Pacific that forged the method of early professional social anthropology as a fieldwork discipline. Central to his account are W.H.R. Rivers and his genealogical method, developed in the course of the 1898 Torres Strait Expedition with Haddon, Seligman and others, and the innovations of Radcliffe-Brown following his West Australian fieldwork in 1910–1912 and his earlier writings on Australian social

organisation.<sup>3</sup> Langham stipulates clearly the bases on which he distinguishes the discipline of social anthropology: First, it had some key terms, 'society', 'function' and 'structure', meaning in the latter case, for instance, 'the combination of behavioural options employed by the society' and reflected in further terminological distinctions such as 'patrilineal' and 'matrilocal' (Langham 1981: xii–xiv). Second, this anthropology provided 'exhaustive treatment of restricted social groups' produced through 'intensive and prolonged fieldwork' (Langham 1981: xv). A third feature was that the discipline had 'close links with British imperialism', being largely dependent on government grants for the intensive fieldwork pursued. He comments:

An anthropology with the avowed aim of uncovering the factors which kept societies in smoothly-functioning harmony, and a national colonial policy which imposed its will upon distant peoples by plugging into the indigenous political organization, could not have been innocent playmates. (Langham 1981: xv)

Finally, he notes the centrality of kinship studies as the major component of comparative work in forms of social organisation in British social anthropology. Namely, a style of study that focused directly on investigated forms of social relatedness, like Meggitt's *Desert People* (1962), rather than notions projected from Europe.

With Radcliffe-Brown's appointment in Sydney, Langham notes the beginnings in Australia of social anthropology as a professional discipline (see also Gray 2007). Once again, he is careful to stipulate the criteria: (i) that there exist the opportunity for rigorous training by practitioners; (ii) that an income is earned from 'contributions to the subject'; (iii) that scientific findings are propagated systematically;<sup>4</sup> (iv) that institutionalisation occurs, preferably at universities; and (v) that the scientific output becomes sufficiently technical to command a specialist 'group of fellow practitioners' (Langham 1981: 245).

These specifications of a particular anthropology that is also a professional discipline, frame Langham's discussion of the various debates around kinship analysis that progressively marked out the parameters of social anthropology. His study helps to locate the phenomenon of 'transitional' anthropology exemplified by Carl Strehlow as well as Spencer and Gillen. In his terms, neither Spencer and Gillen nor Carl Strehlow were engaged in a modern and professional anthropology. And he makes a further pertinent observation on why he would consider this to be the case. At the end of the nineteenth century, the agenda for research was very much set by comparative religionists so that Frazer (Spencer's

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3 A.R. Radcliffe-Brown was professor of the Department of Anthropology at Sydney University between 1926 and 1929 before he travelled to Chicago and thence back to England where he became Professor at Oxford.

4 The journal *Oceania* was first published in 1930.

patron), outside of anthropology, and Tylor within it, were both focused on issues of religion and evolution rather than matters of comparative social organisation (Langham 1981: xviii, xx, 49). These were also issues that absorbed Carl Strehlow and Baldwin Spencer. While they collected data on class systems and Strehlow additionally genealogical data, these did not yet present analyses in comparative social organisation as such. Spencer and Gillen in particular took their lead from Lewis Henry Morgan (1871) and his interest in classificatory terminologies. It would not be until the impact of Rivers, and his genealogical method, that this interest would be refined in Australia and elsewhere.

Langham designated Radcliffe-Brown as the anthropologist writing on indigenous Australia who took the next step. Here he mirrors the mainstream of Australian anthropology that excluded T.G.H. Strehlow's work for a lengthy period, not least because he pursued his father's central interest in language and myth and augmented these with his seminal work on indigenous Australian ontology. Issues of social organisation were secondary to Strehlow jnr and would remain so, due to the intellectual tradition in which he had been raised. Géza Róheim also pursued a tradition somewhat foreign to British social anthropology though Hiatt, with his interest in psychoanalysis, engaged with this work, and the Berndts who contributed to Róheim's Festschrift *Psychoanalysis of Culture*. However, where central Australian ethnography is concerned, it took the work of Nancy Munn (1970) and her interest in the relationship between the individual and the collectivity as mediated by the object world to begin the contemporary re-integration of this tradition into Australian anthropology. Recent interests in a contemporary phenomenology, or social phenomenology, have redeemed T.G.H. Strehlow's work for an interested audience (see, for instance, Myers [1986] 1991; Morton 1987; Redmond 2001; Musharbash 2008; Austin-Broos 2009).

These issues bear on Langham's proposal that his study of the British tradition is intended to echo the work of George Stocking who, although his essays range widely through many terrains of mainly 'Victorian' and early modern anthropology, tends to take his standpoint from contemporary cultural anthropology as it is practised in the United States. This means that Baldwin Spencer, whom Stocking takes to be 'the ethnographer' in the pair of Spencer and Gillen, figures fleetingly in some of his essays, while Carl Strehlow does not figure at all, and his son T.G.H. Strehlow only in a footnote (see Stocking 1987, 1995: 97). Langham suggests that history writing in anthropology should take contemporary issues into account and use older texts to interrogate present assumptions. He remarks that Stocking uses his histories often 'with the express purpose of demolishing myths about the history of anthropology' and to craft 'argument[s]' that 'modern practitioners of the trade will find challenging'

(Langham 1981: xxii). In this respect, Langham's and Stocking's work differs from that of Mulvaney and Calaby (1985) who produced a conventional biography of Spencer, independent of specific anthropological reference points.

This discussion of the contrast between the British and German-American traditions has relied on the initial contrast between Spencer's Darwinism and Strehlow's humanism. To be fair it could be said that the continuity in the English tradition was its general materialism and instrumentalism, rather than Darwinism *per se*, which is partly what made it turn to or stay with kinship, politics and, to a lesser degree, economics. Religion, more in the sense of 'meaning', remained somewhat an add-on until perhaps the 1960s, although T.G.H. Strehlow was trying to straddle this divide in his early essays in the 1930s published as *Aranda Traditions* (1947). These matters have progressed much in contemporary work and in the Arandic context has led to a more mature state in Austin-Broos' *Arrernte Present Arrernte Past* (2009) in which she forcefully argues for the need to deal with 'economy' and 'culture' in the same breath.

## Repositioning T.G.H. Strehlow

Carl Strehlow's opus has implications for the assessment of his youngest son's work. Without doubt the father's masterpiece furnished the foundation for the work of T.G.H. Strehlow. The myth and song collection in *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* (1907–1920) provided a basic model for *Songs of Central Australia* (1971) – T.G.H. Strehlow's much celebrated work. Carl's genealogies gave his son the opportunity to construct family trees reaching sometimes back from the 1960s to the early decades of the nineteenth century. In both these domains of ethnographic work the achievements of the son far surpassed those of the father in volume and in acknowledgements. However, Carl Strehlow's unresourced and lonely work, with only von Leonhardi's support, was equally remarkable in its time. Although T.G.H. Strehlow was marginalised from academic anthropology, he had the support of the University of Adelaide and the Australian National Research Council for many of his ventures. Moreover, Carl Strehlow's massive handwritten dictionary that was intended to give 'anyone' the chance to know the significance of Aranda and Loritja myths,<sup>5</sup> sat for a lifetime unpublished on T.G.H. Strehlow's desk as his personal reference work. Finally, the father smoothed the path for the son in personal as well as scholarly ways. Carl Strehlow's standing among central Australian people conferred a privileged position on his youngest son that facilitated his collection of confidential and classified information. It is beyond the scope of these remarks to explore the reasons why T.G.H. Strehlow allowed his father's

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5 Carl Strehlow to N.W. Thomas, mid to end of 1906 (SH-SP-6-1).

work to lie untranslated in obscurity throughout his own Australian research career. Why parts of Carl's work were not deposited at the Strehlow Research Centre and some material only discovered in the 1990s at the house of T.G.H. Strehlow's widow, Kathleen, are things that we may never know.

T.G.H. Strehlow gained crucial insights from his father's work, but also details such as his statistics on natural species in central Australia. He recorded these in his first diary (1932: 2), and this record subsequently found its way into the second seminal essay of *Aranda Traditions* (1947: 66–67) – based on his father's dictionary work.<sup>6</sup> *Aranda Traditions* (T.G.H. Strehlow 1947) is dedicated to the detailed explanation of the particularities of different Arandic groups and specification, which is reminiscent of early particularism and clearly references the German view that language, including the oral literature of a people, is the manifestation of the *Geist* of a people. All the essays in this publication draw on data or comments from Carl Strehlow's work and possibly from von Leonhardi's letters that were in his possession.

One of von Leonhardi's main concerns was with unwarranted generalisations, a view echoed by T.G.H. Strehlow when he rebutted Baldwin Spencer's attack on his father's work (Strehlow 1947: 68–69, 83). Spencer had alleged that it was nonsense to propose that tjurunga were ever mentioned in the presence of women or that, wrapped with strings to prevent women from seeing them, these tjurunga were laid in wooden baby-carrying trays to hasten children's growth (Strehlow 1908: 80; Spencer 1927: 586). When Strehlow junior defended his father he did so using not simply his own observation but also the carefully worded observations of both von Leonhardi (1904)<sup>7</sup> and Carl Strehlow (Strehlow 1910: 7–8).<sup>8</sup> T.G.H. Strehlow wrote:

... European writers have fallen into serious mistakes owing to their fatal habit of dumping together irreconcilable beliefs collected from different Aranda groups and then attempting to work out a coherent system of religious thought and ceremonial customs for the 'tribe' regarded as a coherent whole. (Strehlow 1947: 69)

In making these remarks, my intention is not to disqualify T.G.H. Strehlow as a scholar – he was an excellent one – but rather to place the achievements of father and son in a more appropriate relation. He admitted that his own research was not completely created *ex nihilo*. Most great thinkers, he observed, have 'certainly been greatly indebted to their own cultures' (Strehlow [1967] 2005: 86). Despite a certain amount of unreferenced reliance on *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien* and his father's language studies, he took his father's work a

6 Quoted in Chapter V.

7 Von Leonhardi to Carl Strehlow, 28.8.1904. Quoted in Chapter IV.

8 Quoted in Chapter IV.

step further by conceptualising the specificity of an Aboriginal ontology and in so doing arguably made Aboriginal culture an object of wonder for many non-indigenous Australians. The father's work and intellectual background allowed the son to write about indigenous relations to land in a way that had not been done prior to the publication of *Aranda Traditions* (1947). T.G.H. Strehlow ends his first essay on Aranda traditions with a Herderian remark that may reflect his father's and his own German enculturation. He wrote what no Anglophone anthropologist would have penned<sup>9</sup> namely that 'the soul of a race is enshrined in its legends' (Strehlow 1947: 46).

It is therefore unfortunate that only late in his career did T.G.H. Strehlow start to look towards North America for ideas on how to integrate his thoughts on culture and language in a more explicit anthropological method. In 1967 he gave a talk entitled 'Man and Language' (Strehlow [1967] 2005: 76–88) at the University of Adelaide. In comments that were conversational in style, he presents in an idiosyncratic and almost anachronistic way, his views on the importance of language study to understanding culture, such that anthropology should be seen to entail appropriate training in linguistics. The divergence of British social anthropology from the language and culture studies of German particularism had made it necessary for T.G.H. Strehlow to state in an awkward fashion matters his father had seemed to take for granted. Far from criticising Strehlow junior, this event reflects the limited representation in Australia at the mid-century point of the style of anthropology that Franz Boas founded and promoted in the United States. At that time in Adelaide, T.G.H. Strehlow's talk was a plea for collaboration between the disciplines, an argument that the study of people must be accompanied by the study of language and vice versa (Kenny and Mitchell 2005: 5). In these remarks the son seemed to respond, albeit unconsciously, to his father's German intellectual and anthropological roots, as revealed in *Die Aranda- und Loritja-Stämme in Zentral-Australien*.

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9 John Morton, pers. comm., 13.11.2012.