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Book and Film Reviews

Naming an Endless Process of Indigenization

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Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century. By James Clifford. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.

q1 *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* is a remarkable collection of essays on indigenous survival, struggle, and renewal, written over the past 20 years by James Clifford and framed through various excessive historical processes, including decolonization, anthropological humanism, settler-colonialism, and neoliberal capitalism. Divided into three parts, the essays introduce three analytical forms—articulation, translation, and performance—that both reflect and create the new conditions of indigenous solidarity, activism, and participation in diverse public spheres.

In part one, Clifford familiarizes the reader with a massive collection of post-1990 ethnographic material on indigenous lifeways from cultural anthropology and repurposes vantage points drawn from cultural studies to make space for contradiction and excess across a broad spectrum of indigenous experiences. Part two, my favorite for its epic structure, considers the old and emerging stories relating to Ishi, the enigmatic and demiurgic California Yahi whose early-twentieth-century cross-cultural friendship with anthropologist Alfred Kroeber is a source of tragedy and hope, terror and healing, and meaning and silence. Here, with unmistakable clarity, Clifford raises the voice of incidental perspectives on critical issues of settler-colonial violence and friendship, linking native and anthropologist q2 so that each forms his own center, while everything else is mere background and context, with the protagonist, Ishi, acting almost as an incidental character. In part three, after acknowledging the complex, unfinished colonial entanglements of anthropologists and indigenous communities, Clifford probes the possibilities and limitations of one collaboration by focusing on the neoliberal self-determination politics associated with a Native heritage exhibit in Alaska, "Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People." Across the text, Clifford himself emerges less and less as a curator of the written word and more as an observer-listener engaged in limited ethnography ("academic visiting").

The title *Returns* grasps at the active, unfinished processes at work in various articulated sites of indigeneity, while protesting against the rational assemblies of explanation that routinely blind us to such work. These sites reflect a kind of transaction, similar to that of gift exchange, whose deferred dividends are never quite those that are expected, but which are nevertheless always unfolding through variously calculated and noncalculated forms of agency emerging under legacies of colonial violence, expropriation, scientific comprehension, labor mobility, gambling casinos, consumerist desire, and industrial disaster—whatever larger forces of structural asymmetry and conflict entangle indigenous peoples with the postcolonial condition. As such, the book invites deferral to the sorts of fantasized displacements, no matter how well-meaning, that continually write the obituary of indigenous peoples, as exemplified in a recent *New York Times* headline, "Do the Amazon's Last Isolated Tribes Still Have a Future?"

Turning to part one, what comes across strongly is that James Clifford is an avid reader of texts. He reads a lot and invests a great deal of effort in acknowledging fragments of indigenous experience, while cross-referencing them into a kind of community of adequate realism. He observes, for example, that the traditional idea of a close-knit association between indigeneity and sense of place (deeply inhabited landscapes) is now being stretched, looped, and otherwise entangled, transformed into multisited identifications that originate in experiences of forced displacement, uprootings, and the cosmo- q3 politan imagination. These multisited practices of indigenous belonging, evident from the ethnography, resist simple characterization, as in claims of the one-way urbanization from rural life. Instead, Clifford recasts this loosening of rootedness through the prism of diaspora theory, thereby introducing border crossings into the analytics of indigenous becoming. The repurposing of indigenous diaspora requires acknowledging the different temporalities and scales involved in this partial translation, replacing the cultural studies emphasis on nationalism with indigenous claims to sovereignty. Actually, translation (communication across divides), political articulation, and performance in public spheres are highlighted techniques of Clifford's "tool kit" for analyzing the sorts of historical transformation and political agency common throughout the book.

Although parts one and three fall legibly under ethnography and history, part two unfolds under what Clifford calls the imaginative collapse of California's settler-colonial history, with no new narrative in sight. Here, new variations performed by California Indians and other native artists and writers provide critical twists, spiritual connections, and new meanings to "Ishi's Story" (the title of part two), subverting the roles expected of Ishi as "the last wild Indian" and unsettling the hegemonic settler-colonial narrative. The essay's treatment of Alfred Kroeber and his science of salvage anthropology, paternalism, admiration, and affection toward Ishi offers a moral reckoning, without finger pointing, that will evoke strong emo-

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tion across the discipline. For example, in *The Word for World is Forest*, a science fiction novel written by Kroeber's daughter Ursula K. Le Guin (2010), Clifford sees the imaginative and unsentimental violence and friendship linking native and anthropologist as an indirect meditation on Kroeber's inability to reconcile interpersonal loyalty, political commitment, and scientific comprehension. It serves also as a parable for recognizing—without leveling accusation—anthropological humanism as both essential and impotent in situations of colonial/anticolonial antagonism.

Two final essays within part three explore the external and internal conditions, forces, and historical circumstances that write the history of the Alutiiq/Sugpiaq of southwestern Alaska. Clifford sees their dramatically increased political practice surrounding identity movements as both a conjuncture and a struggle between corporate liberalism and indigenous heritage, specifically, a type of post-land-claims capitalist modernity on Native terms that is associated with new scales and dimensions of indigenous values and traditions that proliferate in a globally interconnected, locally inflected postmodernity. Heritage work (e.g., oral historical research, cultural explanation through exhibits, and community-based archaeology), with its own poetics and politics, and without which there would be no mobilization around recovery and restoration, has become an integral part of creating a greater sense of Alaska Native self-awareness and identity, responding to demands that originate both inside and outside indigenous communities and mediating new powers and attachments: relations with the land, among local groups, and with both state and transnational forces.

Here, several of Clifford's field observations remain less choate, for example, on imagery and its installation as a judgment device for marking habitus or attachment to locale. One of his photographs, a mask-carver's workshop, is also a promotional image adorning the book cover, and it leaves an impression of proximity between artistic intensity and Native heritage and identity. Still, when the image again makes its appearance on page 268, Clifford attributes its habitus requirements to a "hobby." In another photograph, taken from his perspective as he stands on land and looks out toward open ocean, Native seafarers in kayaks approach the shore, as a type of "return" illustrative of attachments to home. Yet this terra firma–centric attachment to locale contrasts with many historical images and Russian colonial illustrations that stress seafarer observations toward land, a perspective complemented by Alutiiq/Sugpiaq linguistic coastal-naming practices.

Presented as a collage of essays, each of the three parts has a distinct style, with focal strengths that require prescribed forms of distance, yet still allow the reader to perceive the written word in a haptic or tactile way as a real material, a material with expression, functionality, and credibility, not to mention joy and cautious hopefulness. *Returns* demonstrates how written text can act as liberator of meaning—capable, that is, of presenting mythical thought in its abbreviated, accessible form for our postcolonial, postmodern times.

References Cited

Le Guin, Ursula K. 2010. *The word for world is forest*. New York: Tor Books.