

Review of *Irrititja – The Past. Antikirrinya History from Ingomar Station and Beyond* by Ingkama Bobby Brown and Petter Attila Næssan. 2012. Southport, Queensland: Keeaira Press. 64 pages. ISBN 978 0 9805942 5 6 (pbk)

Review by

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This is a review from afar – as an anthropologist working within the context of narratives of the land and environmental issues associated with First Nations (Indigenous peoples) of British Columbia, Canada, I was interested in how the land is narrated elsewhere. *Irrititja* provides such a view. This is a book about linguistic ecology – the ways of how a language, in this case Antikirrinya in Australia, incorporates fundamental ecological changes into its lexicon and world view. Linguistic ecology is defined in the book as “the interrelationships between a speech form and its socio-cultural and natural environment.” The world view that is brought to this epistemology is described as one in which “Traditional Antikirrinmya culture has no distinction between the cultural and the natural.” An underlying theme is what happens when there is a disconnection between the natural and the cultural, when key elements of the natural environment disappear or are replaced. Connecting people and the land is the *dreaming*, the stories and narratives known as Waparr. An important element of the book is in its methodology – the ways in which stories from and about the land – in this case the northwestern region of Southern region of Australia – are recounted through the lens of biography (the live as told by Ingkama Bobby Brown) and what the authors call eco-history and autobiography. Opal mining, nuclear testing, rabbits, dingos, and others are given meanings and visibilities within the indigenous lexicon in northwestern South Australia.

The book in a way interrogates the very terms that are used. For example, the linguistic classification Antikirrinya in itself is described as a term that is subject to different levels of meaning - from linguists and anthropologists to the people themselves.

The first part of the book, largely the voice of Næssan, presents and contextualizes contrastive descriptions of the land as it was used by miners, government agencies, and others, and builds a story around such uses. Part of the process of cultural change was the actual movements of the people, first as people who lived on and knew the land, and then relocations in the region. The words of Ingkama Bobby Brown are then used to build in an alternative view, one which brings the knowledge and changes to the land into the lexicon of the Antikirrinya. Næssan contrasts the experiential and referential aspects of the language with words that come from outside – some of which are brought in as loan words (e.g., matches = *matji*) and others that are fitted into preexisting categories (tea = *irruwa* = herbal drink). Tellingly, though, Næssan points to the the ways in which words associated with native flora and fauna serve as mnemonic

aids for understanding the land, locations of water sources, etc. The loss of original species represents a disconnection to that knowledge, the idea of an abstract re-representation of formerly material elements that formed part of the Waparr stories. It is also pointed out that in language programs, the ascendancy of a selected dialect or language also mutes others; linguistic variability becomes lessened as a single language or dialect is supported by educational resources.

The second part of the book is a set of stories by Ingkama Bobby Brown, in Ingkama Bobby Brown's language and in English, that positions knowledge on the land, and links biography and place. The narratives given are of plants, locations, and animals, and serve to exemplify the importance of local or place-based knowledge. The brevity of the book is overshadowed by its message about language loss and knowledge essential to having a history in and on the land.

There are parallels reflected in accounts of traditional resource use and knowledge of Indigenous peoples in British Columbia and the role of language and meaning in transferring knowledge (e.g., Turner, Ignace, and Ignace 2000 on plants; Ignace and Ignace 2004 on Secwepemc resource use; Armstrong 1995 on Okanagan world view as embodied in the concept of what is known as En'owkin; see also Hudson 2004; Prince 2003 on fisheries). Key overarching concepts connect people, resources, land, and knowledge. The onset of the berries of a particular plant in the interior of British Columbia (along the middle Fraser River) foretold the arrival of a key fish, salmon. The land is then seen as a set of interconnected unfoldings. The loss of key marker species then represents a rip in the fabric of knowledge. This is an issue also reflected in writings from British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest of North America.

This is an important book, as its important message has applications beyond its research area. It is a book about indigenous epistemologies, and the links between language, land, and identity.

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