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Erhard Eylmann's Missionary Position

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Abstract: The German anthropologist Erhard Eylmann relied heavily on assistance provided by missionaries when he undertook fieldwork in Australia. During two periods at the Hermannsburg mission he developed a strained relationship with Carl Strehlow. In his major work Eylmann wrote a damning critique of missionaries. While there was a level of personal animosity between Eylmann and Strehlow, at the heart of the antagonism were fundamental differences concerning the nature and function of the discipline of anthropology. The missionaries sought anthropological knowledge to promote mutual understanding, above all through language, as a prelude to conversion to Christianity. They proceeded from the assumption that the future of Indigenous Australians would be within the context of the adoption of Christian belief systems. Eylmann in contrast took the view that the differences between Europeans and Indigenous Australians were physical, essential and insuperable. Sceptical about the possibility of achieving mutual understanding, he devoted his fieldwork primarily to describing, recording and collecting for the purpose of assembling a detailed record of a population he believed destined for extinction. Eylmann and German missionary anthropologists such as Strehlow had in common that they stood outside the paradigm of British social evolutionistic thinking which dominated Australian anthropology at the time. At the same time, the differences in the anthropological endeavours of Eylmann and Strehlow indicate the great breadth of approaches opening up within German anthropology. In particular they point to the emergence of an 'antihumanist' turn at the end of the nineteenth century.

Keywords: Erhard Eylmann; Carl Strehlow; German anthropology; missionaries

In carrying out their fieldwork, few anthropologists have relied as heavily on the practical assistance provided by missionaries as the German Erhard Eylmann. During his extensive travels in Australia in the last years of the nineteenth century and the first part of the twentieth, Eylmann enjoyed the hospitality of Lutheran, Catholic and Congregationalist missions in a number of remote locations in Australia. That hospitality gave him the opportunity to make extended observations of the Indigenous populations at those sites and to discuss matters of anthropological knowledge with his hosts, some of whom were themselves deeply engaged in anthropological practices.

At the same time, few anthropologists have been so egregiously lacking in gratitude to those who aided them as Erhard Eylmann. Having relied heavily on the aid and goodwill of missionaries, in 1908 Eylmann published the results of his Australian research in *Die Eingeborenen der Kolonie Südaustralien* (The Aborigines of the Colony of South Australia). The book offers detailed studies of many aspects of Indigenous Australian culture and society, the result of observations carried out in territory ranging from the very south of the colony of South Australia through to the very north of the continent. In his effort to write as comprehensive an anthropological study as he believed possible, Eylmann covered such topics as religion, art, language, tools, weapons, disease, rituals, food and much more (Eylmann 1908; Schröder 2004).

In his final chapter, however, Eylmann turns his attention away from his Indigenous subjects to his fellow-Europeans, the missionaries, and delivers a damning assessment of their work in Australia, a topic with which he had become intimately familiar. Over 17 pages, Eylmann excoriates the missionaries, including those who had offered him assistance, without which his book would not have been possible. He accuses them of failing fundamentally to comprehend Indigenous Australians and of devoting their endeavours to what was tantamount to an exercise in futility, that is, the task of converting Indigenous Australians to a system of beliefs to which they were utterly unreceptive and resistant (Eylmann 1908, 464-81).

More than an exemplar of poor manners and ingratitude, Eylmann's work highlights some of the issues which confronted German and other missionaries in their endeavours and which without question remained largely unresolved at the time of his travels. The charge that the missionaries failed to bring about conversions to Christianity on anything like the scale the mission societies and their emissaries envisaged is fundamentally correct, and it is relevant to

any assessment of the missionary endeavour in Australia. More than that, however, Eylmann's views illustrate how vast were the differences in the conceptualisations of the discipline of anthropology in Germany around the turn of the century. Insofar as they explicitly or otherwise took on the role of amateur anthropologists, the German missionaries were anchored firmly in a humanist tradition which emphasised the importance of achieving mutual understanding with the people among whom they lived and whom they studied. Key to their practice was the hermeneutic imperative of gaining insight into the mental world of the 'other'. The most important avenue into that alien mental world was language; through a close study of the words, concepts, syntax and grammar of the other's language – so the missionaries assumed – the thoughts and beliefs of other human beings would be rendered accessible.

Against that tradition, the 'antihumanism' of the branch of German anthropology studied and practised by Erhard Eylmann looked not to inter-subjectivity but to the objective record gathered in the course of fieldwork. What was sought was not mutual understanding but the collection, recording and analysis of the culture of the other. As a contribution to the record of another culture, Eylmann and like-minded anthropologists contended that the intangibility of language rendered it inferior to the empirical evidence in the form of physical measurements or material artefacts.

The notion that there was an 'antihumanist' turn in German anthropology at the end of the nineteenth century has been put most coherently by Andrew Zimmerman. The goal German anthropology set itself was to focus on populations that stood outside a European cultural tradition to focus on people who were thought to lack both history and culture. This new focus demanded an approach which was a radical break from the humanist tradition of empathetic interpretation of the other. Instead, anthropologists adopting the antihumanist turn sought to gather objective, natural scientific knowledge. As Zimmerman puts it,

Anthropology focused not on canonical texts of celebrated cultural peoples but on the bodies and the everyday objects of the colonized natural peoples. The European self should no longer, anthropologists suggested, work itself out through a solipsistic repression of the rest of the world. Anthropology offered Europeans a modern identity as a cultured people whose status depended less on humanist *Bildung*, or self-cultivation, than on the development of the natural sciences – including anthropology as the study of natural peoples. (Zimmerman 2001, 4)

To take this antihumanist turn did not necessarily mean that German anthropologists adopted the ‘science’ of race, that they endorsed a hierarchy of peoples, or that they abandoned the notions of a common humanity. In the most part the practitioners of this new direction in German anthropology resisted racial taxonomies, polygenesis and evolutionism; politically they tended until the end of the nineteenth century to remain liberal and progressive in their outlook (Massin 1998, 79-154). However, in the way they conceptualised their discipline, and in the way they sought to understand the non-European ‘other’, a fundamental shift had taken place.

A study of the vexed relationship between Erhard Eylmann and the missionaries can exemplify a paradigm shift occurring in German anthropology at the time of Erhard Eylmann’s Australian fieldwork. It offers insight into the range of theoretical foundations, functions and practices that marked German anthropology in that era. Despite their shared national identity, worlds separated Eylmann from his German missionary hosts, just as the discipline of anthropology, at a dynamic stage of its development, was pushing in vastly different directions.

Erhard Eylmann

The anthropological work of Erhard Eylmann remains largely unknown in the land to which he devoted a major part of his working life. Only some chapters of his book have been translated;¹ other writings by Eylmann in anthropology and other disciplines have also been largely consigned to oblivion (Eylmann 1902, Eylmann 1911, Eylmann 1914, Eylmann 1922). Similarly the full-length biography of Eylmann remains untranslated (Schroeder 2006), though a handful of works in English have cast light on his activities in Australia, and in particular his prodigious achievement in traversing the continent twice and walking extraordinary distances in pursuit of knowledge, above all anthropological knowledge (Courto 1990, 2004; Hintze 1996; Monteath 2013a, Monteath 2013b).

¹ Various chapters have been translated, though they do not include the final chapter dealing with missions. See K. Sherlock (1972), ‘Adhesives and Cements’, *Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia* 10, 4-12; R. Hubel (1994), *Selected Chapters of Erhard Eylmann’s Die Eingeborenen der Kolonie Südastralien*, Darwin: Robin Hodgson; Willem Christiaan (Bill) Gerritsen and Rupert Gerritsen (2002), *A Further Translation of Selected Chapters of Dr Erhard Eylmann’s Die Eingeborenen der Kolonie Südastralien*, Canberra, Intellectual Property Publications.

The outline of Eylmann's life was established in 1938, a dozen years after his death in penury in 1926 (Bunzendahl 1938; Schröder 2002, 220-32). The author, Otto Bunzendahl, was concerned to establish the details of Eylmann's identity for the benefit of Bremen's *Überseemuseum* (Overseas Museum), which had become – and remains – the repository of Eylmann's anthropological collection as well as his journals and notebooks. Bunzendahl recorded that Eylmann was born on Krautsand, an island in the Elbe River, in 1860. He attended school in nearby Stade, then in Otterndorf and Osnabrück. Thereafter he enrolled to study in Leipzig, where he took courses in botany, physics, chemistry and comparative anatomy while also attending lectures on the history of philosophy and German grammar. From the middle of 1884 he studied toward a qualification in medicine, and to that end devoted himself to the natural sciences, with a particular interest in zoology. Such was his dedication to the last that he completed a doctorate with a thesis on European daphnids. Thereafter he pursued further his qualification in medicine, this time at the University of Würzburg, from which he graduated as a doctor of medicine (Bunzendahl 1938, 33-80).

In 1891 Eylmann married Bertha Maria Ruh, whom he had met during his studies in Freiburg, and the couple moved to Cairo, where Eylmann practised medicine until his wife's death in 1894. From that time Eylmann did not practise medicine again, returning to Germany and devoting himself to the study of geography, geology and anthropology in Berlin (Bunzendahl 1938, 37-40). Whether the interest in anthropology was triggered by his experience of Egypt is not clear, though it should be noted that in Germany and elsewhere the path into anthropology, a discipline still establishing its institutional foundations in universities in the late nineteenth century, was not unusual. The most prominent of the German anthropologists of the day, Rudolf Virchow, who founded the *Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* (Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory) and edited the seminal journal *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* (Journal of Ethnology), came to anthropology via medicine and pathology. Similarly, Adolf Bastian, one of the founders and the first director of Berlin's *Museum für Völkerkunde* (Museum of Anthropology), studied medicine (attending lectures by Virchow) before settling on anthropology as the passion he would pursue for most of his life (Zimmerman 2001, 45-49). For convenience the term 'anthropology' is used in this paper for the broad range of labels that appeared in German institutions and publications in the discipline's nascent phase. For our purposes it covers the German terms 'Anthropologie', 'Ethnographie', 'Ethnologie'. While the last two could easily be translated as 'ethnography' and 'ethnology', it is worth

bearing in mind that the German term ‘Anthropologie’ in a late nineteenth and early twentieth century context means quite specifically ‘physical anthropology’, the primary area of interest of Virchow and many others who came to the discipline via the natural sciences. The German word ‘Völkerkunde’ can be understood as the anthropological study of non-European peoples, while ‘Volkskunde’, also a discipline in the ascendancy in the German post-unification era, relates to the study of Europeans or specifically of Germans and might be understood as akin to ‘folklore studies’.

Whether Eylmann became acquainted with or was indirectly influenced by Virchow and Bastian is unknown. It is likely that in his Berlin years he visited Bastian’s museum and attended events organised by the Society for Anthropology, Ethnology and Prehistory. He did not, however, take any of the opportunities that presented themselves to participate in anthropological expeditions to parts of the formal colonial empire which Germany had begun to establish from 1884. Instead, Eylmann’s clear ambition was to undertake an expedition to Australia, made with his own resources and travelling largely alone. It is conceivable, as Courto suggests, that the choice of such a remote location was driven at least in part by personal reasons, not least the desire to purge unhappy memories stemming from his wife’s death (Courto 2004, 146). From an anthropological perspective the choice of Australia is consistent with a widespread perception among anthropologists at the time that Australia, and more specifically central Australia, offered a rare chance to observe a *Naturvolk* – a people of nature – living in pristine circumstances, still largely undisturbed by the impact of modern civilization. It was a view put by the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan in 1880, when he observed that Indigenous Australian societies ‘now represent the condition of mankind in savagery better than it is elsewhere represented on the earth – a condition now rapidly passing away’ (Morgan 1880, 2).

Such studies of *Naturvölker* (peoples of nature) were considered valuable because they held the promise of offering insight into humankind at a stage of development that had long been surpassed by the time of the nineteenth century. They were central to the work of German anthropologists in the nineteenth century, though the German interest could be traced back as far as the eighteenth century and the figure of Gottfried Herder, who introduced the term. To form a binary taxonomy that featured prominently in German anthropological thought the concept of *Kulturvölker* came into circulation in Germany in the 1840s (Löchte 2005, 100). German anthropological studies of Indigenous Australians remained rare; what knowledge

had been gathered was in large part the work of missionaries, untrained in the modern, empirical methodologies to which Eylmann was exposed in Berlin in the 1890s.

Whatever its motivation, Eylmann's interest in Australia took on the quality of an abiding obsession, unsatiated by three visits over the period 1896 to 1913. The First World War and its aftermath did not allow a return to Australia, but Eylmann, reduced to poverty, continued to work on his collection of Australian *ethnographica* and to harbour hopes of further publications and a further visit until his death in 1926 (Bunzendahl 1938, 60-64).

Australian fieldwork

The first and longest of Eylmann's three visits to Australia commenced in Adelaide in February of 1896. He spent some weeks preparing an overland expedition, in part by reading voraciously what literature he could find relating to anthropology and other scientific disciplines (Eylmann 1908, 6). Armed with that knowledge he commenced his travels in March 1896, travelling by train to the railhead at Oodnadatta and then purchasing two horses to continue his travels north. His intention was to make his way at leisurely pace to the very north of the Northern Territory. He travelled, as he himself expressed it, 'like a regular bushman. I used one horse for riding, and the other horse carried my precious possessions' (Eylmann 1908, 7).

Making a number of lengthy stops along the way, generally by making departures from the Overland Telegraph Line which linked Adelaide with Darwin (at that time Palmerston), Eylmann finally reached his destination in August of 1897. After spending the wet season in the far north Eylmann made his way south early the following year, making lengthy detours in search of fresh observations, until arriving in Adelaide at the very end of December 1898. (Eylmann 1908, 22)

Shortly thereafter he continued his travels, this time setting off by foot to the colony's south-east, and over a period of five weeks followed the coast as far as Cape Otway before returning to Adelaide via the Grampians and Border Town. On this journey he saw very few Indigenous people but claimed nonetheless to have added much to his knowledge by exploring middens, abandoned camps and burial sites as well as by speaking with settlers about their experiences of coastal tribes (Eylmann 1908, 23). After two weeks back in

Adelaide he boarded a vessel bound for Germany (Eylmann 1908, 22; Bunzendahl 1938, 55-56).

Just over a year later, in June of 1900, he was back in Australia for his second visit. On this occasion he headed directly to South Australia's south-east, followed by a longer trek to Killalpaninna on Cooper's Creek, after which he returned to Germany (Bunzendahl 1938, 57).

Little is known of Eylmann's third and final visit to Australia. It took place in the years 1912-13 and did not entail a return to Central Australia. Instead his travels seem to have been confined to the south-east, involved a good deal of travel by Murray steamer, and took him from South Australia into what was by now the state of Victoria. By this time his major anthropological work had already been published (Eylmann 1908), so that it is likely that his primary concerns on this third and final visit to Australia were not anthropological. Publications stemming from this period are in the disciplines of ornithology and sociology (Eylmann 1914; Eylmann 1922).

Interaction with missionaries

Missionaries were useful to Eylmann in two ways. The mode of his travels indicates that apart from covering huge distances to observe a great variety of Indigenous communities, he also intended to spend extended periods of time with particular groups. As his intended itinerary would take him from Adelaide to Palmerston, following the Overland Telegraph Line, the people with whom he would spend time were those living either on the line or within reachable distance to the east or west of it. Apart from settlements and pastoral stations, mission stations offered the prospect of Eylmann experiencing sustained contact with Indigenous populations living there. By and large missionaries cultivated well-established connections with Indigenous people and so would be able to facilitate for Eylmann direct contact with Indigenous people and at times act as interpreters.

There were several occasions on which missionaries fulfilled both these roles. On his travels north from Adelaide in 1896 Eylmann departed from the Overland Telegraph Line at Alice Springs (at that time Stuart Town) to make his way to the Lutheran Mission at Hermannsburg on the Finke River. The Hermannsburg Mission had been founded in 1877 by missionaries

from the Hermannsburg Mission Society in Lower Saxony, but from 1894 had been run by the Neuendettelsau-trained missionary Carl Strehlow. Appointed by the Immanuel Synod in Adelaide to serve under J.G. Reuther at the Killalpaninna mission on Cooper Creek, Strehlow's move north to Hermannsburg resulted from the Immanuel Synod's decision to revive Hermannsburg after the original, Hermannsburg-trained missionaries had departed in 1891 (Harris 1990, 382-89; Brauer 1956, 223-31; Veit 1990; Leske 1996, 96-104). This visit to Hermannsburg was an extended one, as Eylmann arrived there after a 150-kilometre journey from Alice Springs in October 1896 and did not return to the Overland Telegraph Line until February of 1897 (Eylmann 1908, 12). During those months Eylmann made smaller expeditions into surrounding lands, visiting such locations as Tempe Downs Station and the police station at Illamurta, while maintaining the Hermannsburg mission as a base. His journal indicates that during this period he consulted with the missionaries and other Europeans at Hermannsburg on matters of anthropology. The missionaries Carl Strehlow and Johannes Bogner proved important sources of information, as did an employee by the name of Pfitzner and 'a baptised Black' by the name of Nathanael (Eylmann 1996, 36-64). Eylmann later wrote of this period in Hermannsburg that it afforded him 'an opportunity to observe the West-Arreente and their neighbours the Loritja [Eylmann's spellings are 'Arünta' and 'Lurritji'] in their lives and their activities' (Eylmann 1908, 12).

Before reaching Darwin later that year Eylmann detoured to the Catholic mission on the Daly River, where Austrian and Irish Jesuits introduced him to the local Indigenous population. Catholic missionaries had been present on the Daly River since 1886.² It is clear from Eylmann's description of his visit that he received generous assistance from his fellow German-speakers, who demanded of the mission's pupils that they answer the questions Eylmann posed of them, and with one of the Austrians he took a boat ride downriver to the Pongo-Pongo, followed by a journey on horseback over several days to Mount Tolmer (Eylmann 1908, 14). For their part, the Jesuits recorded Eylmann's brief visit: 'A man called Eilmann [sic], a German, came and pitched his tent opposite the Reduction. He says he has come to see the district' (DRM 25 July 1897). Later it is recorded, 'Dr Eilmann went to the

² The history of Catholic missions in the region was patchy. The first mission station was struck by disease and crop failure; a new one was opened on more fertile land in 1889, but then both stations were closed in 1891 to support a new station on the other side of the river – removed from what was seen as the corrupting influence of European miners. This was St Joseph's mission, which Eylmann curiously misnames St Catharina. It was destroyed by floods a year after Eylmann's visit. See 'Our Story' at <http://www.darwin.catholic.org.au/our-story/history-nt-church.htm>

Copper Mines where he will meet Fr. Marschner and Br. Scharmer in the afternoon to go on an excursion to Mt. Tolmer and view that region' (DRM 2 August 1897).

On his way south again returning to Adelaide, Eylmann made his way in the first week of July 1898 from Alice Springs back to Hermannsburg and remained there until the middle of October. On this occasion, he later reported, he was able to gain insights into the ritual practices of the people there; on numerous expeditions he came into contact with groups of Loritja people (Eylmann, 1908, 18-19). As on the more extended stay at Hermannsburg during his northward journey, Eylmann received substantial help in his anthropological fieldwork from missionaries and others at the mission.

Eylmann's second, shorter visit to Australia in 1900 was remarkable for the extent to which he appears to have targeted mission stations as the locations for his fieldwork. From Adelaide he made a brief visit to the station at Point McLeay (later known as Raukkan), on Lake Alexandrina. (Eylmann 1908, 23) He had been unable to visit the station on his previous attempt in May 1899 (Eylmann 1996, 241). That station had been founded in 1859 on the initiative of the Aborigines' Friends' Association; the dominating figure in the mission's history was the mercurial, British-born Congregationalist minister George Taplin. While pursuing his Christianising mission, Taplin himself had adopted a keen anthropological interest in the Ngarrindjeri people and published the results of his research (Taplin 1874, 1879). In his journal from his mid-1900 visit to Point McLeay, Eylmann records that the minister at Point McLeay at that time, Mr Garnett, suggested that Eylmann not end his visit the day after his arrival but extend it to be able to gather more material. Eylmann gratefully accepted the offer because, as he put it, 'I have continually made the best studies of Aborigines at mission stations' (Eylmann, 1996, 287).

From Point McLeay, Eylmann's destination was the Bethesda mission station at Killalpaninna on Cooper Creek, where he remained for some six weeks (Eylmann 1908, 23). Through Carl Strehlow, Eylmann would have known much about the early years of Killalpaninna, because Strehlow had served under J.G. Reuther for two years at Killalpaninna before going to Hermannsburg; the two missionaries together had translated the New Testament into Dieri (Strehlow 2011, 308-58). When Eylmann visited Killalpaninna from 9 July to 15 August 1900, Reuther was still at the mission and still a keen student of Indigenous culture and language, having by this time completed grammars of the Dieri; the Wonkanguru and

Yandruwanta; a Dieri dictionary would follow, as would the acquisition of a large ethnographic collection (SAMA 2007).³ To what extent Eylmann had communicated with Reuther in advance of his visit is not recorded, but it is clear from Eylmann's journal that he received substantial assistance from Reuther in the course of his visit, including access to Reuther's own ethnographic collection (Eylmann 1996, 299). Similarly Eylmann records the assistance given to him by missionaries Nicol Wettengel and Otto Siebert and the station administrator Hermann Vogelsang (Eylmann 1996, 258-277).⁴

Eylmann, it should be noted, was not exclusively reliant on missionaries for his studies. He records that prior to his departure from Adelaide he spent time preparing for his fieldwork by using the library, museums, the zoological and the botanic garden (Eylmann 1908, 6). Moreover, on his return from his first, long journey he consulted extensively with a fellow German, the scientist Amandus Zietz, at the South Australian Museum (Eylmann 1908, 6). During his travels he benefitted from the generosity of numerous hosts, and by his own account gleaned valuable information from such people as the policeman Ernest Cowle at Illamurta near Hermannsburg (Eylmann 1996, 39, 65) and from the Alice Springs telegraph station master Frank Gillen, who pursued his own anthropological interests in collaboration with the Melbourne-based Walter Baldwin Spencer. Gillen accommodated the visiting German twice, shared information with him, guiding him to an Indigenous community near Alice Springs and later meeting with Eylmann in Adelaide (Eylmann 1996, 35-36, 72-74, 241-42). After his initial contact with Eylmann, Gillen wrote to Spencer:

We have had a visit from a German scientist MD and PhD, a geologist etc., he has gone on to Barrow Creek and will stay a week or two with me on his return. He was greatly interested in my Anthro photos and never tired of looking at them. ... A most interesting man this German, unmistakably a Gentleman, he has been a great deal in Egypt and the Soudan and is altogether an Emir Pasha⁵ like individual. (Gillen 1896)

³ For a guide to the anthropological work undertaken by Reuther at Bethesda, see Guide to Records of Reverend Johann Georg Reuther, <http://archives.samuseum.sa.gov.au/aa266/provlist.htm>

⁴ Like Eylmann, Siebert was to return eventually to Germany, where Eylmann took up contact with him as he worked on his book. (Eylmann 1908, 473)

⁵ Gillen means here Emin Pasha, who was born in Silesia into a German-Jewish family under the name Isaak Eduard Schnitzer. He studied medicine and became a doctor but then entered the service of the Ottoman empire, travelling and working widely within it before appearing in Khartoum in 1875. There he practised medicine and pursued his scientific interests, hence the similarity to Eylmann. From 1878 he was appointed governor of the province of Equatoria.

Such was Eylmann's gratitude for the support provided him by Gillen that in return he offered to make some sketches for Gillen, one of which was published in Spencer and Gillen's (1899, 631) *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (see also Courto 2004, 147.).

Nonetheless, in terms not only of the time he spent as the guest of missionaries in southern, central and northern Australia, but also with regard to the expenditure of time and effort on Eylmann's behalf, Congregationalist, Catholic and above all German Lutherans, did vastly more to aid Eylmann's anthropological and other scientific projects than any other individual or organisation.

Eylmann's critique of the missionaries

Having benefitted extensively from missionary hospitality during the two field-work trips upon which his studies were based, Eylmann devoted the final chapter of *Die Eingeborenen der Kolonie Südaustralien* to an assessment of missionary activity in Australia.

He set a clear tone for his assessment with the chapter's opening words, 'It appears that an ill omen has hung over the mission among Australia's Aborigines from the beginning. Nowhere have the missionaries achieved their desired success, but their efforts in some areas have certainly accelerated the death of the race [*Rassentod*]' (Eylmann 1908, 464). The 'desired success' to which he alludes relates to the conversion of Aboriginal Australians to Christianity, an outcome achieved in only rare circumstances regardless of region of Church denomination. More pointedly, Eylmann implies that missionary activity in Australia had contributed to what he understood to be the death of an entire race.

As Eylmann expresses his condemnation of the missionaries, he also reveals his essentially racist understanding of their alleged victims. In his view the poor record of the missionaries in securing conversions was attributable to multiple factors, not least the inappropriateness of Christianity for a so-called *Naturvolk* on, as he saw it, the lowest rung of culture. Eylmann poses the rhetorical question, 'Can a human being such as the Australian, who has quite different views on good and evil than us and who engages in a tough, daily struggle for survival, be lovingly led to a God from whom he can expect no mercy because his weakness renders him incapable of following that God's commandments?' (Eylmann 1908, 464). Sceptical of the capacity of Christianity to appeal to Indigenous Australians, Eylmann goes so far as to wonder whether Islam might prove a more enticing prospect:

It [ie Islam] promises the pious a paradise which offers pleasures only the liveliest imagination of an oriental can imagine, whereas the reward for the few Christians who have unlocked the gates of heaven solely through divine grace and mercy, has little that is attractive for a son of the wilderness. At no time would the heralds of Christian faith rescue a ‘savage’ [*Wilder*] from the path to ‘damnation’ if they did not know how to intimidate him with threats of horrifying punishments in hell (Eylmann 1908, 464).

Eylmann proceeds then to blame the missionaries themselves for their failures. They did not lack enthusiasm, he conceded, but they set about their task ‘without a knowledge of human nature’ (Eylmann 1908, 464). Steeped in Christian notions of right and wrong, good and evil, they made demands which Aborigines in large part could not or did not want to meet. The widespread practice of polygamy was a case in point, as was the missionaries’ intolerance of traditional ceremonies and rituals. ‘It is obvious’, he claimed, ‘that a missionary cannot win the hearts of the Aborigines if he does not spare tradition. Above all banning participation in corroborees and secret ceremonies provokes great resistance everywhere’ (Eylmann 1908, 464-65). On the other hand, Eylmann also accused the missionaries of lacking the necessary firmness and discipline in their dealings with Indigenous people. Nothing is achieved, he argues, by mildness, docility and goodness. On the contrary, the ‘savage’ respects only the man ‘who without consideration for the feelings of others imposes his will, who appears to know no fear, and who is schooled in the usual activities of a “pioneer of civilisation”, such as riding and hunting’ (Eylmann 1908, 465).

The missions furthermore suffered from chronic shortages of funding and poor choice of location. Eylmann perceptively noted that the tendency had been to locate mission stations near transport routes and in areas where European settlement had already begun. The consequence was that Europeans would target the Aboriginal women and incite Indigenous people at the missions stations to rebel against the missionaries, undermining their authority at every opportunity, even to the point of disseminating lies concerning missionary abuse of women (Eylmann 1908, 30).

In part Eylmann attributes the shortcomings of the missionaries to what he regards as essential characteristics of the people they sought to convert. As an example he names the allegedly irresistible urge for Indigenous people to remove themselves for periods or weeks

or months from the missions, during which they reverted to their traditional lifestyle. On returning to the mission school, the children resumed their places on the benches in a 'wild state' (Eylmann 1908, 465). Even those Indigenous adults who undertook paid work at the stations in Eylmann's view shamelessly deceived their employers. While appearing to have eschewed any participation in traditional ceremonies and rituals, behind the missionaries' backs they returned to their old ways. Worst of all were the women, who had abandoned themselves to sloth, and whose behaviour was devoted solely to satisfying their urges for food and sex. Only in the rarest instances was conversion to Christianity motivated by a genuine attraction to the religion (Eylmann 1908, 465-66).

Given the fundamental flaws in the mission project, the errors and failings of the missionaries, and the resistance of Indigenous people to the missionaries' labours, Eylmann could draw just one conclusion – missionary activity in Australia amounted to a waste of thousands of pounds annually. It was his conviction that it would be a matter of centuries before a people which stood 'on the lowest level of civilisation [*Gesittung*]' could be brought to adopt a 'Christian-European' culture. Such a time frame in Eylmann's assessment was in any case irrelevant: 'As the Australian Aborigines are fast disappearing, all attempts to convert them are completely useless' (Eylmann 1908, 466).

Eylmann then provides an overview of ill-fated mission activity in South Australia and its Northern Territory, commencing in 1838 with the emissaries of the Dresden Missionary Society, who were active in Adelaide, Encounter Bay and Port Lincoln through the first decade of the colony's existence. He proceeds to subsequent mission efforts – German and other – ranging from Taplin's efforts at Point McLeay, through the mission stations at Poonindie and Point Pearce, the short-lived efforts of the Moravians at Kopperamanna in the Cooper Creek region, and then the Lutherans' efforts in the same vicinity (Eylmann 1908, 466-73).

However Eylmann's most detailed description, and with it his most scathing assessment, is reserved for the mission station at which he spent the most time, namely Hermannsburg. He traces its history back to its foundation in 1875 and the failed efforts of its first missionaries, trained in the seminary in Saxon Hermannsburg. Then he considers the more recent history of the mission after its acquisition by the Immanuel Synod and the central role played by Carl Strehlow (Eylmann 1908, 473-74).

Here Eylmann was able to bring to bear his own experiences of Hermannsburg's Indigenous and European population, gathered over a total of eight months. He describes the adult Aborigines on the mission as 'among the greatest blackguards in the land', while the children in his view 'in their bad manners outdid the scum of our cities and in their uncleanness fell behind the uncivilized Aborigines'. As for the missionaries, they made the crucial mistake of attaching credibility to the word of the older converted Aborigines – or *Heidenchristen* ('heathen Christians') as Eylmann labels them – with the result that the missionaries were constantly deceived. Moreover, in failing to impose an appropriate work regime on their charges, while at the same time providing all their material needs, the missionaries unwittingly promoted slothful behaviour (Eylmann 1908, 474).

One section of Eylmann's report on missionary activity at Hermannsburg is worth citing at some length, because it reveals the kind of thinking which underpinned Eylmann's harsh assessment of the mission. Eylmann describes mission life on a typical Sunday:

It is around sunrise on a Sunday. On the station a deep silence still prevails. On the Finke River in contrast, where the 'camp blacks' have set up camp, there is a loud knocking. Here a number of lubras, starved to a skeletal state, are in the process of stamping on roasted pieces of a six-month-old ox skin they have found in the vicinity of a stockyard so as to be able to make a watery brew with which to still their gnawing hunger. In the camp where the mission pupils live, too, things are gradually stirring to life. A few lubras hurry shivering, hair hanging tangled around their heads, into the kitchens, where they quickly light the fires in the stoves, so that the water is already boiling in the mighty tea kettles when the white women appear. After breakfast the missionary Bogner hands one boy meat and a little damper for the pupils, and the missionaries' wives fetch the lubras' Sunday clothes. In the meantime young and old have gathered at the store, and straight away one hears their pleasant-sounding singing carrying into the distance. At about 9 a loud ringing sounds out. It signals the beginning of a church service for the Aborigines. From the houses and huts appear simply dressed men, lubras who look noticeably somewhat spruced up, and children mostly clothed in just a shirt, and they make their way laughing and chatting into the church, where they take their places on benches set up in two rows, girls separated from boys. As soon as missionary Strehlow, the teacher and pastor, has reached the pulpit, there is deep silence, and all of the adults appear to listen with deep interest to the sermon, which is held in the Arunta language. Some of the infants – the children are constantly taken to the services – leave their mothers' laps and with joyful expressions begin to crawl around between both rows of benches. Suddenly one of the lubras jumps up excitedly, grabs one of these offspring and leaves the

church with him as fast as she can. Everyone's nose soon makes clear the cause of the disturbance. After the service the gravity of the church visitors suddenly disappears. As soon as they are in the open, they joke with much laughter about the language errors missionary Strehlow has committed. I would like to take this opportunity to stress the folly of which the missionaries are guilty when after a relatively short stay in a foreign land they dare to preach in the language of their pupils. It is then unavoidable that they make error upon error and as a consequence only provoke laughter among their listeners but do not make even the slightest impression on their hearts. (Eylmann 1908, 476)

Conclusions

The harshness of Eylmann's condemnation of German missionary activity in Australia stems in part from a level of personal animosity between Eylmann and Carl Strehlow (Strehlow 2011, 593-602). It does not appear to be replicated in Eylmann's assessment of such figures as Reuther, Siebert and Wettengel at Bethesda, or of Bogner at Hermannsburg. Strehlow found it odd that a medical doctor – as Eylmann was – would travel to that part of the world without his instruments; his story seemed inconsistent. The two men barely spoke with each other over the three and a half months of Eylmann's first visit. The policeman Ernest Cowle, who knew both Strehlow and Eylmann, observed that the latter 'has *not* been working in any way with Strehlow and in fact Strehlow appears to have been just as rabbit-holey with him as with everyone else for he tells me he only spoke with him five or six times altogether' (Cowle 1897, 613-14).

Nonetheless personal animosity alone does not explain the radically different approaches to anthropological work pursued by Eylmann on the one hand and Strehlow and his fellow missionaries on the other. Although both were trained in Germany, stood firmly in German intellectual and cultural traditions, and wrote long and highly detailed anthropological studies in German dealing with similar subject matter, their approaches to anthropology were vastly different and lie at the heart of Eylmann's severe assessment, not just of Strehlow but missionary activity generally.

Central to Strehlow's enterprise as a missionary was the quest to *understand* Aboriginal Australians; the acquisition of anthropological knowledge was central to that quest. For Strehlow, as for other missionaries, the over-riding task of bringing the Christian gospel to

non-Christians was to be achieved through understanding the mental world of those to be converted. Only through such an understanding of existing systems of belief would it be possible to introduce new ones. Missionary anthropological practice thus rested on a paradigm of inter-subjectivity, that is, its assumption was that it was possible to establish a relationship of mutual understanding.

A crucial element in the establishment of such a relationship was language, and it was for this reason that the learning of Indigenous languages was a component of much German missionary endeavour. It is especially evident in the work of Carl Strehlow, who with Reuther had translated the Bible into Dieri at Killalpaninna, and who soon after his arrival at Hermannsburg sought to acquire the language of the Aranda and, as Erhard Eylmann observed, undertook to preach to the Indigenous people in their own language.

Erhard Eylmann's scepticism about the value of prioritising the study of language is nowhere clearer than his mocking description of the church service Strehlow conducted at Hermannsburg. In Eylmann's account Strehlow's mastery of the language is limited, as his understanding of the mental world of those whom he wishes to convert. The Indigenous parishioners for their part engage only superficially with the Christian worldview which Strehlow is at pains to impart to them. The relationship between pastor and his Indigenous flock is one of mutual incomprehension, a world removed from the ideal for which the missionaries strove.

Eylmann thus represents a paradigm of anthropological practice starkly at odds with that favoured by the missionaries. Trained in the natural and the medical sciences, he understood his own anthropological practice to be empirically based and objective. The anthropologist was to be the dispassionate observer who collects data for analysis. Eylmann himself at times included Indigenous vocabulary among his data set, but only as one element among a wide gamut of material gathered for analysis. More commonly his urge to collect and analyse focused on physical evidence of Indigenous societies, in media ranging from weaponry to cultural artefacts and sketched recordings of body art or anatomy. Nonetheless, it is also evident from Eylmann's own writings that any notion that he was collecting his data in the context of Indigenous communities hitherto untouched by Europeans was false. His work was very heavily mediated by the missionaries, and it was in the context of communities already very heavily transformed by the missionary presence.

Eylmann's anthropological practice in Australia fits with Andrew Zimmerman's contention that in the late nineteenth century German anthropology was turning away from what he characterizes as a humanist paradigm, favoured by missionaries and others. In Zimmerman's view, anthropology in Wilhelmine Germany underwent an 'anti-humanist turn'. This first became evident in such institutions as the anthropological museums which pursued the collection and exhibition of *ethnographica* from all parts of the globe with an enthusiasm bordering on a mania. It was also evident in the anthropological societies which sprang up in various parts of the country, as well as, eventually, in the institutional consolidation of anthropology within the German university system (Zimmerman 2001).

The attitude toward language is the most striking characteristic of the new paradigm. While the practitioners of this antihumanist approach continued to support and advise the collection of language-related data alongside a comprehensive range of other information and artefacts, they attached relatively little importance to linguistics. Their approach was to caution against the use of language alone to characterize ethnic groups, affirming the greater importance in their view of physical characteristics and customs (Zimmerman 2001, 52). Language for them was 'an unacceptably subjective and mutable source of knowledge'; greater trust was to be placed in the value of objects (Zimmerman 2001, 53). In this approach languages were not regarded as illustrations of peoples' true nature 'but only their subjective responses to historical circumstance. In contrast to language, "material" would provide a source of knowledge more secure than, because independent from, these historical and subjective factors' (Zimmerman 2001, 53). Erhard Eylmann, schooled in this paradigm in the 1890s, not only placed little emphasis in his own work on learning Indigenous languages, he was deeply critical of the missionaries for their very efforts in language acquisition, quite apart from the allegedly limited competence they attained.

Like the humanist paradigm it sought to supplant, this antihumanist turn in German anthropology transcended national boundaries. In Eylmann's case it was evident in the positive relationship he developed with Frank Gillen. Although Eylmann never met Gillen's collaborator Baldwin Spencer, and although their work was rooted in different anthropological traditions, their views on the value of missionary anthropology were strikingly similar. As Veit (2004, 107) points out, Spencer had a 'contempt for the

missionaries, whose scientific work is not recognised'. And like Eylmann, Spencer could see no sense in the value of imparting new ideas to Indigenous people:

To attempt ... to teach them ideas absolutely foreign to their minds and which they are utterly incapable of grasping simply results in destroying their faith in the precepts which they have been taught by their elders and in giving them in return nothing which they can understand. In contact with the white man the aborigine is doomed to disappear: it is far better that as much as possible he should be left in his native state and that no attempt should be made either to cause him to lose faith in the strict tribal rules, or to teach him abstract ideas which are utterly beyond the comprehension of an aborigine. (Spencer 1896, Vol 1: 111)

Eylmann's critique of the missionaries thus highlights the differing assumptions underpinning these opposing paradigms. Eylmann, like Spencer, proceeded from the assumption that the level of development of Aboriginal Australians ensured that they would become extinct when confronted with the realities of European settlement. The form of anthropology he practised was therefore a form of 'salvage anthropology'; his intention was to gather artefacts and knowledge, and to write as comprehensive an anthropological account as he could, before Indigenous Australians disappeared forever. The German missionaries, in contrast, while acknowledging cultural differences, did not assume that the colonial encounter between Europeans and Indigenous Australians must necessarily lead to the extinction of the latter. They did not envisage that the people themselves were doomed to disappear, though they applied a distinctly Christian understanding of 'salvation', according to which their physical survival would be achieved through the adoption of a Christian belief system.

Finally, it is tempting to cast the relationship between Eylmann and the missionaries as one between a representative of a new, scientific and professional form of anthropology, practised as an end in itself, and an older form of lay anthropology, useful as a means to an end. Yet this is true only in a qualified sense. Eylmann's claims to dispassionate objectivity are soon seen to be hollow; he commonly engages in culture and gender stereotyping and unwarranted essentialising of differences. His scientism rests at least in part on the very humanist foundations he seeks to discredit, as he seeks to reinterpret data received at second hand or through hearsay. In this regard he was as much a product of his time as were his missionary countrymen.

Moreover, while Eylmann personifies the rise of a new paradigm of anthropological research, and with it the emergence of a professionally-trained practitioners, he does not herald the demise of missionary anthropology in Australia. If anything, his nemesis Carl Strehlow proved a more influential figure into the twentieth century, largely through the efforts of Moritz von Leonhardi in Frankfurt, who not only encouraged Strehlow's fieldwork from afar but also ensured that through publication in Europe Strehlow's data and interpretations would reach a wider European readership (Strehlow 1907-1920). In Australia, the outbreak of war meant that the influence of German anthropological endeavour of all kinds entered a period of rapid and terminal decline, as a consequence of which neither Eylmann's book nor Strehlow's work was ever made available to an Australian readership in English. Nonetheless, anthropology in Australia never fully embraced the 'antihumanist' turn which characterizes Eylmann's endeavours. While the heyday of the German missionaries was past, the assumptions and practices which had driven Christian missionary anthropology in Australia for decades remained an important and – for better or worse – influential force.

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