



Terra Nullius: A Journey Through No One's Land

Sven Lindqvist, Sarah Death (Translator)

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Long before the word “genocide” was coined, the British invasion of Australia had annihilated approximately nine-tenths of the continent’s original population of Aborigines. The creation of white Australia depended upon the legal fiction of “terra nullius”—no man’s land—the claim that Aboriginal lands were inhabited by people who would soon die out and who could be helped on the way to extinction if they lingered.

Sven Lindqvist, the widely acclaimed and internationally renowned author of “*Exterminate All the Brutes*” and *A History of Bombing*, brings his original sensibility to bear as he travels 7,000 miles through Australia in search of places where belief in the rights of the white man and the annihilation of the “lower races” were put into practice. While Australia continues to reckon with its violent past—echoed in the United States’ treatment of Native Americans and Europe’s colonization of other continents—Lindqvist evokes a shocking history in which young boys were kidnapped to dive for pearls, then whipped and abandoned when the bends ruined them for work; “half-caste” children were taken from their mothers; and natives were misdiagnosed with STDs, put in neck irons, and sent to internment camps on remote islands. Lindqvist also recalls the work of ethnologists who brought their own prejudices to bear in studying Aborigines as primitives close to the origins of civilization, later inspiring Freud and Durkheim. At the same time he describes a beautiful and strange land, sacred to the native people who had inhabited it for centuries and celebrated in a long tradition of richly symbolic art.

A movingly idiosyncratic travelogue and a powerful act of historical excavation, *Terra Nullius* is the illuminating and disturbing story of how “no man’s land” became the province of the white man.

Terra Nullius: A Journey Through No One's Land Details

Date : Published May 9th 2007 by The New Press (first published April 1st 2005)

ISBN : 9781595580511

Author : Sven Lindqvist , Sarah Death (Translator)

Format : Hardcover 248 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Cultural, Australia, Travel, European Literature, Swedish Literature

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Jenny says

Terra Nullius är en viktig bok med ett skräckmande innehåll. Författaren Sven Lindqvist reser runt i Australiens västra del, från Moorundie upp till Darwin och vidare längst med kusten till Ceduna, för att beskriva hur och varför landet är som det är i dag. Han delar upp boken i fyra olika avseenden för att på så sätt kunna diskutera den numera förkastade begreppet terra nullius. Boken tar formen av en resedagbok som beskriver de städer och byar han reser till, boken är även en slags tolkning av de drömmar han är under resan, boken är också ett personreportage om olika upptäcktsresande och forskare som alla skrev om Australien men boken är framförallt en skildring av de vitas syn på urinvånarna och de folkmord som begåtts sedan 1800-talet. Jag blir förfärad av det jag läser om de vitas invasion av Australien, trots att inget av det Lindqvist skriver om är nytt för mig, men det är nog omöjligt att inte bli berörd hur många gånger jag än läser om det. Lindqvists huvudfråga, enligt min uppfattning, handlar om ånger och om man kan ångra andras brott. Kan jag som nu levande mänskliga ångra de brott som andra svenskar begick under andra världskriget? Lindqvist menar att ju större kollektivet blir, desto mer tunnas det personliga ansvaret ut.

Statsskulden vandrar vidare från generation till generation. Likaså nationalförmögenheten, som är många gånger större än statsskulden. Bara genom att födas svensk var jag född rik. [...] Och när jag tagit emot fördelarna med att vara svensk, hur skulle jag då kunna säga nej till nackdelarna? [...] Det var mitt eget lands fega eftergiftspolitik jag hade att tacka för att jag aldrig blivit bombad eller skjuten eller ens behövt gå och lägga mig hungrig. Gammelmoran hade ju rätt. Jag hade varit med och delat rovet. Alltså måste jag vara med och ta ansvaret.

Det skräckmande med Australiens historia är nog att utrotningen av aboriginerna pågick under en sådan lång tid utan hinder. Ofta vill mänsklor gärna tro att allt det där hemska, oavsett vad det gäller, hände för länge sedan. Det hände då och absolut inte nu. Men det är inte sant om Australien. Det hände faktiskt i modern historia ändå in på 1980-talet. Det var aldrig någon som brydde sig tillräckligt eller förmådde sig att straffa de vita för deras brott. Givetvis fanns det modiga mänsklor som arbetade för aboriginernas sak men de tystades alltid ner på ett eller annat sätt. Det var egentligen först på 1990-talet som förföljelserna stoppades och Australiens vita befolkning började ta sitt ansvar och inledde en försoningsprocess med urbefolkningen i Australien.

Terra Nullius är en jätteintressant och nödvändig bok. Jag insåg ganska tidigt att jag däremot hade helt fel utgåva av boken. Den är i alldeles för dålig kvalitet med svartvita bilder. Jag skulle vilja se hur den är som inbunden. Jag tror att det bidrog lite till takten jag läste boken. Men det är bara småsaker egentligen. Något av betydligt större vikt är att boken var för påskyndad. Lindqvist ville berätta så mycket om Australien historia på så få sidor att det ibland upplevdes som stressande och raskt. Boken hade gott och väl kunnat vara dubbelt så lång utan problem.

Lorraine says

A book written as a travel log and historical fact-finding mission by Swedish travel writer Sven Lindqvist. He travels Australia looking for reference to the original Australians. What follows is a gritty, emotion-packed, painful tête-à-tête between colonial past and a democratic present which seems to have obliterated the need for recognition of the cultural identity of the continent as it moves into its future. The consequences of this are devastating for many of the aboriginal Australians Lindqvist meets along the way.

Kim Zinkowski says

A. My first Lindqvist. Charlie has this now...

Rebecca says

A travel writing that digs deep into sensitive issues concerning the Australian Aboriginal rights. Lindqvist threw us a very thought-provoking question of whether the guilt concerning inhuman treatments towards the Aborigines is inherited and collective.

His journey into the no-man's land (terra nullius), was a mental, as much as it was a physical one, into this question. In the end, he gave us his answer, which is still up for a debate in my opinion.

Ilahee says

Unveiled Truth in all its brilliance. Through documenting his travels of half the continent, Sven Lindqvist writes a better account of Australian history than most Australian historians. This book should be in the Australian history curriculum at every high school around the country.

One star short because no mention of:

1. Tasmanian genocide
2. Eastern states genocide
3. WEH Stanner and Selective White History
4. Corporate crimes through mining

5. Also using art as a means to success - could have said more about the problems of finding success through commodifying religious and spiritual elements and selling yourself into a western constructed culture of liberal capitalism.

Naeem says

Lindqvist uses the same form as in his *Exterminate All the Brutes*. That book is a masterpiece against which this one seems a bit hurried. But *Terra Nullius* has its own charms. Lindqvist still does four things: travelogue, dream interpretation, reportage of novels written about his travel places by writers of previous generations,

and of course, the topic is always genocide.

I wish he had done more work on how we acquire the benefits of genocide. Powerful work after which one cannot think of Australia or its native populations in the same manner.

Thanks to Greg for this book.

March 2008,

A second, much more careful read of this book, changes my assessment. I still find that compared to his "Exterminate All the Brutes," this book is less subtle, slightly less devastating. But "Exterminate" is about the expression of a deep wound and the vocalization of enormous volcanic anger -- as expressed by a Swede, not by some one from Martinique (Fanon). Terra Nullius, accomplishes what Exterminate accomplishes that but with more directness, with more immediate punch.

I can see Sven's project shifting. He adds the element of responsibility, reparations, justice, and healing. He is slowly moving us to a policy recommendation, to some kind of mediation between our exploiter and exploited selves. I am told (by Sara Maria) that his next book is out and waiting to be translated into English. Can't wait.

In addition, the trope of "Terra Nullius" has enormous connectivity. It might be the central concept of modernity. Because of this innovation, Sven evermore simplifies his message.

Ah Sven, a few more books please, before you leave us....

Joanna says

„Terra Nullius” to w cz?ci reporta? podró?niczy, czyta?am go b?d?c we wschodniej cz?ci Australii i dzi?ki Lindqvistowi zobaczy?am inny kraj i to nie tylko w sensie geograficznym.

W „Terra nullius” dziennikarz opowiada przede wszystkim o tym jak europejscy osadnicy zagarniali ziemi? Aborygenów podpieraj?c si? autorytetem Darwina, który uwa?a? wyt?pieńie pierwotnej ludno?ci tzw. narodów barbarzy?skich, za naturalny element procesu ewolucji.

A pozbywaj?c si? pierwotnych mieszka?ów stwarzano ziemi?niczyj?, do której, zgodnie z doktryn? „terra nullius”, nabywali prawa biali osadnicy.

Lindqvist pokazuje, ?e traktowanie Aborygenów jako rasy ni?szej by?o powszechnie w XIX wieku i na pocz?tku wieku XX nie tylko w?ród niewykszta?conych kolonizatorów, ale i w?ród autorytetów ?wiata naukowego jak Durkheim czy Freud czy ?wiata literackiego i szerzej sztuki.

W reporta?u znajdziemy te? pozytywne odst?pstwa od tego podej?cia, w?ród nich przyk?ad Bronis?awa Malinowskiego, ale przede wszystkim powszechnie nieznanych osób dzi?ki zaanga?owaniu których finalnie uda?o si? odmieni? postrzeganie Aborygenów.

Bardzo ciekawie i wyczerpuj?co opisana jest te? rola sztuki w procesie zwracania Aborygenom ludzkiej twarzy.

Wiele w tym reporta?u przyk?adów niewyobra?alnego okrucie?stwa jak odbieranie matkom dzieci, seksualne wykorzystywanie, zmuszanie do niewolniczej pracy, a wszystko to opisane niepoprawnym politycznie j?zykiem bia?ych oprawców, co wzmacnia odbiór brutalnego przekazu tego reporta?u.

I zostawia z pytaniem o wspó?odpowiedzialno?? dzisiejszych mieszka?ów Australii za wci?? nienaprawione i nienaprawialne krzywdy wyrz?dzone temu narodowi.

KO says

A great starting point on Australia, references a lot of fiction and nonfiction, so though this is a short book I ended up with a bunch of Aussie books to read after.

The recent savagery of Australian immigrants (white Europeans) over the original inhabitants is documented better elsewhere, but this book is a much better first read.

Mariusz Slowikowski says

Trzeba czyta?.

Mo?e kiedy? zrob? t? tras?.

Tomasz says

Opowie?? o Aborygenach. O próbie ich wyniszczenia przez w?adze Australii (wpierw kolonialne potem rodzime). O odbieraniu ziemi i prawa do istnienia. O odbieranych dzieciach, które wychowywane w przytu?kach przypominaj?cych obozy pracy. O tym, jak mo?na wpierw odebra? prawo do ?ycia na swojej ziemi, potem miano cz?owieka, a na koniec jeszcze zrob? prób? j?drowa na rodzimych i ?wi?tych ziemiach (bo czemu by nie). I wreszcie opowie?? o odzyskaniu godno?ci, walce o prawa i powrocie poprzez sztuk?.

Paul says

Another great book from Sven Lindkvist. This is a unique blend of informed travelogue with historical analysis, social anthropology, and the origins of modern Australian art & literature.

Lindkvist accounts for how the white European settlement of Australia in turn resulted in the wholesale systematic dispossession of the indigenous aboriginal peoples. Of course it doesn't end there - not only were their lands and waters stolen but there was a conscious attempt to actually exterminate them altogether. Citing countless and varied sources he demonstrates how this peaked in the 1930s - one exponent even calls it 'the final solution' - and would even continue in many aspects well into the post-WW2 era.

Families are separated, children interned in labour camps, boys made to pearl-dive, girls sent away as maids (often to repeated sexual & physical abuse), mothers would have their babies taken away, and the men would be utterly disenfranchised and often arrested, rounded-up, beaten, disappeared, and even shot. Time after time the authorities would turn a blind eye or even encourage these acts. The prison islands for supposed carriers of STDs were little more than concentration camps for the thousands...

Towards its end, Lindqvist's book explores how through art the persecuted peoples have made a sort of breakthrough into modern Australian identity and consciousness. The subject of restitution is an ongoing one and has clearly become a hot political issue in 21st century Australia.

As others will doubtless echo - all Australians should read this book, but it isn't a story unique to that country alone. We should all look at our own countries and ask ourselves did this happen here? Did we do it over there? Are we still responsible for it happening?

C.R. Miller says

Depressing and enlightening, a travel book with history as its guide. At first I struggled with what I assumed to be a narrow focus on the mistreatment and atrocities suffered by Aborigines at the hands of the white settlers and Australian government. But as Lindqvist folded in more about the history of clumsy attempts to incorporate superficial knowledge of Aborigines into early theories of human cultural development, the book became grounded in a larger historical and intellectual context. But it was his endeavors to explain the Aboriginal worldview and spiritual life and connection to the earth that I found most fascinating and which provided a focal point for all of the historical critiques (and even tied in his at times resonant description of the temporal elements of his travels -- the landscape, weather, and light). This is the second book by Lindqvist that I've read, and they both come across with a very strong point of view and style of exposition that can be distracting or off-putting. But in the end I find myself impressed and satisfied at the depth of his research and analysis. The contemporary travelogue element of *Terra Nullius* brings additional depth and seasoning to what is otherwise a history book. Recommended.

Kimbofo says

Proving that my reading tastes are wide-ranging, this non-fiction book explores my interest in racism against Aboriginal Australians. First published in Sweden in 2005, it charts the history of black and white relations in Australia from the first point of contact in the 18th century to the current day.

The author, Sven Lindqvist, an accomplished essayist and journalist, seems to have made a name for himself writing about cultural genocide (he has written similar books about black and white relations in Africa), and much of what he covers here makes for uncomfortable reading. Yet sometimes his passion (and fury) gets a little overwrought, and detracts from the important message at the book's heart.

But on the whole, I found this an eye-opening read. Part entertaining travelogue, part searing polemic, it's certainly one of the most thought-provoking books I've read all year.

Ingram says

Fascinating and important book to read. It helps to go somewhat to understand the horrible crimes perpetrated against Indigenous Australians but also the impact that flawed ethnographic studies of Aboriginal communities impacted key theories of human development that placed indigenous culture/history at the

lowest point.

Baran ????? says

Ne bir gezi kitab?, ne de Aborijinlere yap?lanlarla ilgili ?sveçli bir adam?n tüm Bat?l?lar ad?na günah ç?karmas?, ne edebi bir eser, ne Avustralya'n?n yerlilerine dair antropolojik bilgilerin bölümlerin aras?nda gezindi?i bir yar?-akademik bir derleme, ne de ?rkç?l?k tarihinin bir parças?na ???k tutan bir günc. Bunlar?n hiçbiri de?il, daha fazlas?. K?sa, öz, sars?c? ve sürükleyici ve dürüst bir dili var kitab?n. Türkçeye de çevrilmeli kanaatimce....
