

# Aboriginality in the city: re-reading Koorie photographs

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During the 1930s and 1940s dramatic changes occurred in the lives of Koories in the settled south-east of Australia when they left behind remote reserves and moved into towns and cities. Within assimilation rhetoric this progressive urbanisation was viewed positively as the outcome of people's desire to escape rural isolation and become part of the wider Australian community but more recently the category of the 'urban Aborigine' has come to be seen as 'historically and politically volatile'.<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal urbanisation – whether by choice or under duress – entailed risks and required new strategies of survival. Although government administrators and humanitarians believed that Aboriginal people deserved equal rights it was assumed that the Aboriginality of many Koories had been erased in the process of colonisation. Urbanisation further threatened to erase a Koorie presence.

In this article I take up these issues in relation to Koorie photographs in Melbourne during the era of 'high assimilation' from the late 1930s to 1970. In retrieving recognition for a dynamic and resilient Koorie presence in Melbourne my analysis is not intended to diminish or overlook the forces of domination and repression at work in colonial power relationships. Rather, by examining these photographic images within a particular historical context and the various registers in which they can be understood in relation to constructions of cultural identity and self-fashioning by metropolitan minorities, this paper explores the importance of the photographic genre in the formation of a 'vernacular modernism'. In so doing my paper highlights the gap between the rhetoric of assimilation policies and the reality of Koorie life and society at a time when relations between Koories and the wider community were often starkly polarised and Koories were engaged in political struggles to strengthen the status and well-being of their people.

Since colonisation, many hundreds and thousands of photographic images have resulted from the lenses of European photographers. In seeking to reconsider the photographic medium within contemporary debates on colonialism, race and representation, attention has focused on the insights of writers such as Edward Said and Michael Foucault. They tend to construct photographic imagery and practice as a set of authoritative and essentialising 'truths' that simplistically represent Indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Rowse 2000.

people through the West's discursive strategies of power and knowledge.<sup>2</sup> For many writers, photography's 'distancing, objectifying mode of perception constitutes an inherent feature of modern "scopic regimes" making [it] an ideal tool of surveillance and control'.<sup>3</sup> Indeed there are many instances where the photographic images of subaltern groups often seem to be resistant to Indigenous interpretations 'irrevocably marked by the exploitation sanctioned by invasion'.<sup>4</sup> For example Roslyn Poignant's study of the group of the nine Aboriginal men removed from Palm Island and Hinchinbrook Island in Queensland and taken overseas for display with PT Barnum's circus tracks the incorporation of these subjects within racial stereotypes.<sup>5</sup> Indigenous curator Michael Aird in his 1993 exhibition *Portraits of the Elders* found he could not include the 1930s portrait of Andrew Ball, a resident of Cherbourg settlement in the south-east Queensland because his frontal and profile portraits embodied such oppression.<sup>6</sup> Similar photographs appeared in Melbourne's *Argus* newspaper in 1934 recording a scientific project undertaken at Lake Tyers Aboriginal settlement in Victoria by a group of scholars from Melbourne University aimed at documenting 'The Vanishing Aborigine'.<sup>7</sup> In arguing that the photograph is a 'mode of production' operating within 'more or less coherent systems of ideas and representations [as] an apparatus of ideological control' John Tagg articulates a view of photography that is determined in hegemonic terms in relation to the power and ideology of the nation state.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless there is a danger that in arguing for the authority of photographic images we lose sight of the many complex factors at work in cross-cultural representations generally: the dynamics of the historical encounter, the conditions of production and reception and the willing participation of Indigenous subjects creating the possibility for many and varied readings.<sup>9</sup> Just as the project of colonialism itself is now seen as inherently flawed and problematic, so too, photography is understood to allow more diverse and varied interpretations than previously acknowledged. Where previous commentators have read photography's indexical relation to reality as evidence of 'closure and fixity', Christopher Pinney finds that 'the inability of the lens to discriminate ensures a ... margin of excess ... in every photographic image'.<sup>10</sup> Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of the photographic image points out that 'all images are polysemous' implying 'a floating chain of signifieds' allowing the reader to 'choose some and ignore others'.<sup>11</sup> Substantive research in historical collections and the perspective provided by Indigenous histories indicate that Aboriginal people have willingly engaged in photographic practices for their own purposes.<sup>12</sup> In particular I draw on recent studies by Jane Lydon, Michael Aird and Gaynor Macdonald. Lydon's in-depth study of the photographic images commissioned at the Coranderrk Aboriginal station on the

2. Pinney 2003a: 2.

3. Lydon 2005: 2.

4. Lydon 2005: 3.

5. Poignant 1997.

6. Aird 2003: 27.

7. *Argus*, 28 February 1934: 5.

8. Tagg 1984: 123.

9. Bell 1999; Pinney 2003a; Lydon 2005; McBryde 1985.

10. Pinney 2003a: 6.

11. Barthes 1982: 39.

12. McBryde 1985; Poignant 1996; Stephen 2000; Lydon 2002, 2005.

outskirts Melbourne in the late nineteenth century demonstrates that photography became:

a powerful visual language ... shaped through a process of exchange between black and white [and through the circulation of images in] the mass media of the press and commercial photography. ... A crucial aspect of the resident's political savvy and their ability to manipulate public debate ... was their self-conscious understanding of how they were represented in white discourse.<sup>13</sup>

From this model Lydon suggests that it is possible to recover a performative relationship between the photographic image and Aboriginal subjects, one that allows archival images, postcards and media images to be reinterpreted from an Indigenous perspective. Generally it seems Indigenous people simply ignore or even undermine the interpretations of photographs provided by critics of colonialism and postmodernism.<sup>14</sup> Michael Aird's 1993 exhibition *Portraits of our Elders* comprised Aboriginal portraits from the 1860s to the 1920s. Recalling his response to the exhibition Aird says, 'I have ... often seen Aboriginal people look past the stereotypical way in which their relatives and ancestors have been portrayed, because they are just happy to be able to see photographs of people who play a part in their family's history'.<sup>15</sup> Similarly anthropologist Gaynor Macdonald has found that collections of family snapshots are among 'the most prized and jealously guarded of all Wiradjuri Aboriginal "material" possessions'.<sup>16</sup> Most particularly for Aboriginal people like the Wiradjuri who have been excluded from the mythical traditions of Aboriginality and erased from colonial history, family photographs fulfil multiple roles: a means of strengthening the continuity of family ties, an affirmation of Aboriginal identity and a means of negotiating sociality through time and space by validating the past.<sup>17</sup> Building on these insights Christopher Pinney has argued that the Indigenous appropriation of photographic genre in postcolonial settings in the formation of a 'vernacular modernism' departs from the previous emphasis on objective documentary to 'project a materiality of the surface' and a concern with a 'tactile relationship with the viewer'.<sup>18</sup>

If, as Indigenous academic Marcia Langton has observed, 'Aboriginality ... is a field of intersubjectivity ... that is remade over and over again in the process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation, and interpretation'<sup>19</sup> between Aborigines and non-Aborigines, then we need to understand the role played by photography in the construction of individual and community identities. In colonial contexts these identities will necessarily be contingent and contested. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues, identity 'is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.'<sup>20</sup>

13. Lydon 2005: xiii; Lydon 2002: 82.

14. Macdonald 2003: 227.

15. Aird 2003: 25.

16. Macdonald 2003; see also Somerville et. al. 1994; Aird 1993.

17. Macdonald 2003: 225.

18. Pinney 2003b.

19. Langton 1993: 33.

20. Hall, 1990: 225.

The historical context for the Koories with whom I am concerned lies in the generations of oppression and discrimination experienced by Koories at the hand of colonial governments. Historians Peter Read, Heather Goodall and Bain Attwood have documented in depth the Aboriginal history of Koorie communities in the south-eastern Australia.<sup>21</sup> Until recently assimilation has been understood in relation to the progressive implementation of federal government policies between the late 1930s and 1970s but from the viewpoint of Aboriginal history, government policies conceived as part of the effort to transform Indigenous Australians are better seen as part of a collective Indigenous experience of colonisation.<sup>22</sup> In the late nineteenth century governments took the first official forays into assimilation with the Aboriginal Protection Acts of 1869 and 1886 and the Aborigines Act of 1890. By means of this legislation Aborigines of mixed-descent were expected to be absorbed into the wider community while the doomed remnant 'full-blood' populations remained on reserves. The intent to break up Koorie communities — seen as genocide by some commentators — was implemented through the progressive closure of reserves, and, if necessary, the removal of children. In the 1940s a further strategy aimed at breaking up existing communities targeted the independent camps established by Koories, such as those at Toorloo Arm and Jackson's Track in Victoria, and on the Murray River. The opportunity for housing in nearby towns was used to lure Koories into abandoning their own communities.

### Jackson's Track

Jackson's Track was a timber-milling settlement near Drouin in Victoria established by Daryl Tonkin and his brother Harry in the late 1930s. Employment provided by the mill supported an independent Koorie community. In his recently published memoirs Daryl Tonkin vividly recalls the freedom and independence which prevailed at Jackson's Track, where Koories lived with a greater degree of autonomy than was possible on government reserves. Life at Jackson's Track proceeded on the basis of an Aboriginal sociality grounded in connections to kin, in the spiritual beliefs associated with *bugeens*, *mrartchets* (ghosts), and *dooligahs*, living in sturdily built bush huts (fig 1) utilising and sharing the resources of the land.<sup>23</sup> Most Sundays, Pastor Doug Nicholls visited Jackson's Track for a church service bringing 'city blackfellas' with him (fig 2) and every year Nicholls organised a Christmas party for the children. For Koories with connections to Jackson's Track, the photographs taken by Richard Seeger, a photographer with the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and a member of the congregation at Doug Nicholl's Gore St Church of Christ in Fitzroy, hold great significance. As Aird points out, photographic collections by white Australians with close connections to Koorie communities are important because they document the daily life of Koories and relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.<sup>24</sup> On a more personal note Macdonald observes that Koorie photos are about people:

photos bring people who are not present ... into the co-present, into relationship. But the photo also places them in time and place ... Most of all, Kooris' photos are

21. Read 1988; Goodall 1996; Attwood 1989, 2003; Attwood and Marcus 2004.

22. Rowse 2005a: 3–4.

23. Tonkin and Landon 1999: 42, 224–6, 239.

24. Aird 2003: 30



Fig 1: Two houses on Jackson's Track, Victoria, c.1950–1959. Photographed by Richard Seeger, XP1627. Reproduced courtesy of Museum Victoria.

about people, a form of connectedness, used as a mnemonic of kin-relatedness, sometimes of events but more often people.<sup>25</sup>

Seeger's photographs are usually of family groups — seldom of individuals.<sup>26</sup> Photographs are a form of cultural capital in Koorie communities. Aware of their value, Seeger printed copies of his photographs for everyone concerned.<sup>27</sup> Yet shifts in assimilation policy saw the closure of this independent Koorie settlement targeted by shire authorities and church members who sought to 'clean up' 'the black problem' out on Jackson's Track. Koories' clean and well-kept bush homes were destroyed: bulldozed and burnt.<sup>28</sup> In the face of this erasure, Seeger's photographs provide a focus for mem-

25. Macdonald 2003: 234.

26. Macdonald 2003: 235.

27. Jackomos, letter to the author, 15 May 1992.



Fig 2: Pastor Doug Nicholls leading a broadcast of hymns on Jackson's Track, Victoria, c. 1947–1960, Photographed by Richard Seeger, XP1640. Reproduced courtesy of Museum Victoria and the Nicholls family.

ory, verifying the web of connectedness linking people and place. In Barthes' analysis the photograph establishes 'a new space-time category,' an awareness of '*having-been-there*'.<sup>29</sup> The photograph is therefore a reconstitution of the past:

at once the past and the real. The Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*. This distinction is decisive. In front of a photograph, our consciousness does not necessarily take the nostalgic path of memory ... but the path of certainty: the Photograph's essence is to ratify what it represents.<sup>30</sup>

28. Tonkin and Landon 1999: 253.

29. Barthes 1982: 44 (emphasis in the original).

30. Barthes 1981: 85.

These photographs continue to be valued by those Koories with associations to Jackson's Track. Although Jackson's Track no longer exists, the photographs provide confirmation that it was there.<sup>31</sup> It is confirmation of a Koorie presence otherwise erased from recognition.

A Koorie history emerges from these photographs. In the late nineteenth century Koories regularly used petitions to protest against their treatment at the hands of colonial administration. This history of protest first emerged at Coranderrk Aboriginal station established in 1863 by the lay preacher John Green when Kulin men, under the leadership of *ngurungaeta* or headman Simon Wonga and later William Barak, walked the 60 kilometres to Melbourne to petition colonial officials and present gifts — actions in keeping with their own well-established traditions of exchange relations.<sup>32</sup> At Maloga mission station on the Murray River established by Daniel and Janet Matthews, Pangerang and Yorta Yorta also petitioned the governor of New South Wales for land. This tradition of protest became the precursor to the political organisations formed in the 1920s and 1930s — sometimes with white support, as in the Australian Aborigines' League co-founded by William Cooper and Arthur Burdeau, and sometimes independently in alliance with international organisations such as the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association led by Fred Maynard.<sup>33</sup> Although regionally based these organisations worked on a national front: in 1933 William Cooper, one of Daniel Matthew's converts, drafted a petition to King George VI in 1933 and it was Cooper who conceived of the highly symbolic Day of Mourning held in Sydney on 26 January 1938 in protest against the sesqui-centenary celebrations of European colonisation.<sup>34</sup> In the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s Koorie activism addressed two key issues. First, they protested against the forcible dispersal on and off reserves, the ever-present fear of child removal and the gradual loss of civil rights. Second, on a broader national front, William Cooper specifically rejected policies of assimilation based on the absorption of 'half castes' into the white majority.<sup>35</sup> Arguing for a new pan-Aboriginality he called upon white Australians to 'think black'.<sup>36</sup>

The problem was that Koories were invisible. With colonisation Koories suffered a traumatic break with the past. As Macdonald points out:

Until recent decades, the notion of a [Koorie] past has been represented and experienced as loss — of land, people and culture. Temporalised as belonging to a former, primitive or traditional culture which no longer existed, they were seen as the cultureless.<sup>37</sup>

In 1981 Indigenous academic Marcia Langton criticised this 'culture of poverty' approach as an ideological deception created by anthropologists, arguing instead that urban Aborigines see themselves as adaptable and resilient.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile these cultural

31. MacDonald 2003: 237.

32. McBryde 1984.

33. Maynard 2005: 16, 20.

34. Attwood and Markus 2004: 58-64.

35. Attwood 2003: 68.

36. Attwood 2003: 63.

37. MacDonald 2003: 238.

38. Langton 1981.

constructions of race contributed to a 'politics of visibility', which allowed the evidence for a dynamic and resilient Koori culture in south-east Australia to be rendered invisible.<sup>39</sup> The anthropologist Dianne Barwick in the 1960s was among the first to redress these oversights. In her doctoral thesis Barwick demonstrated that 'the dark people of Melbourne' or Kuris as they referred to themselves, retained their regional affiliations to reserves and their wider connections with an extended family.<sup>40</sup> Most importantly Barwick challenged ideas of tradition arguing that traditions are never static: they encompass both continuity and change.<sup>41</sup>

Dramatic changes occurred when Koories moved into the city, under varying degrees of choice or coercion. Until the 1930s Koories were generally excluded from towns and cities. As Paul Carter has pointed out, imperial history occurs within 'spatial and conceptual coordinates': the city was a focus of power and a contested site of the colonial imaginary.<sup>42</sup> Once in the city Koories found that they had to develop new strategies of survival. While the outbreak of World War II provided new opportunities for employment and forged new alliances with Koories from other regional communities, at the same time Koories found themselves crowded into inner-city tenements with few places to meet except the houses of families and friends and excluded from the convivial atmosphere provided by hotels. Following customary traditions of sociality, Koories tended to congregate in public parks and spaces where they came to the attention of police resulting in escalating rates of incarceration for Aboriginal men.<sup>43</sup> But the city also offered new opportunities, potential sites for cross-cultural exchange which could be exploited by Koorie leaders to gain attention for their Aboriginal cause. For example, Doug Nicholls, a protégé of William Cooper and a participant in the Day of Mourning who played a leading role in the church and social welfare, utilized the space of the Yarra Bank to speak on behalf of his people.

### A metropolitan marriage

A photograph of the mid-war marriage of Susie Murray and George Patten at Melbourne's prestigious Ormond Road Baptist Church<sup>44</sup> (fig 3) is remarkable for the rich insights it provides into the life stories of key figures in the Melbourne Koorie community. As I have shown, through well-established traditions of exchange relations Koories understood the importance of rituals of diplomacy in the negotiation of inter-relationships. Over many years Kulin at Coranderrk, exploiting their close proximity to Melbourne, gained renown as brilliant diplomats, enabling them to assert ownership of Coranderrk.<sup>45</sup> Staging Aboriginality through public performances — even within the constraints imposed by assimilation policies — fulfilled an important role. Bringing Indigenous performers and audience participants together created a context for the possible renegotiation of identities. Victor Turner, writing about the transformative potential of cultural performances, suggests that they take place in liminal zones out-

39. Neale 2000: 271.

40. Barwick 1964, 1972, 1973.

41. Atwood 2003: 250.

42. Carter 1987: 46.

43. Rowse 2000.

44. Jackomos and Fowell 1991: 97.

45. Lydon 2002; Attwood 2003: 3-30.



Fig 3: The wedding of Susie Murray and George Patten, 1940. Image courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Alick Jackomos Collection (image number N3747.08a). Reproduced courtesy of Herbie Patten.

side the discrete frame allotted to ritual life yet separate from the quotidian world of the everyday.<sup>46</sup> Viewed as a form of social and symbolic action these cultural performances are seen to be 'reciprocal and reflexive' offering Indigenous performers and their audience participants an opportunity for a critique of social life.<sup>47</sup>

It seems that every aspect of this marriage ceremony from the elaborate wedding gown and the military guard of honour to the arch of boomerangs is the result of meticulously planning — part of a deliberate strategy aimed at capturing the attention of the wider community. The strategy was spectacularly successful. A photograph of the wedding appeared in the *Argus* on 23 September 1940. Under the caption, 'Arch of Boomerangs: A Aboriginal Wedding', the anonymous reporter described the wedding in glowing terms:

A wedding between two members of the aboriginal race of Australia will take place this afternoon at the Ormond Baptist Church. The bridegroom is Mr George Patten, a well-known speaker on aboriginal life, and his bride is Miss Susie Evelyn Murray who was born at Lake Tyers.

The bride's veil, which is almost a hundred years old, is being lent by Rev. W McEwan, and Mrs and Mrs Keith Holland, who take a great interest in aboriginal welfare, will give the young people a wedding breakfast. Mr Doug Nicholls the former Fitzroy footballer will be best man and members of aboriginal families in the AIF will form a guard of honour at the church making an arch with boomerangs through which the bride and groom will pass.<sup>48</sup>

The paternalistic tone of the article neatly captures the idealism of colonial rhetoric. The wedding is taken as symbol of successful assimilation: George Patten is commended for his scholarly pursuits, Susie Murray's connection with the Aboriginal reserve of Lake Tyers legitimates her Aboriginal status while the best man, Doug Nicholls, is introduced via his achievements on the sporting field — one of the key means by which Aborigines were able to negotiate racial discrimination and achieve a degree of equality.<sup>49</sup> Following European traditions Susie Murray is dressed in white, she carries a bouquet of flowers and confetti showers the smiling bride and groom who walk beneath the arch of honour surrounded by family, friends and the wider church community.

However, the account provided by the *Age* differs markedly from the reality of Koorie lives, serving to mask both the level of political activism in which these Koories were engaged and the ongoing discrimination and opposition they endured. The Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira was likewise celebrated for his successful assimilation but the tragic circumstances surrounding his imprisonment and death highlight the contradictions between assimilation policies and the lived reality of Aboriginal people. The charismatic George Patten played a leading role in Koorie political struggles for equality and recognition. The previous year George Patten and his brother Jack, who participated in the Day of Mourning in Sydney, had led a walk-off from Cummeragunja reserve in New South Wales. This was the culmination of long-standing

46. Turner 1986: 22.

47. Turner 1986: 22; Myers 1994: 679.

48. 'Arch of Boomerangs: A Aboriginal Wedding,' *Argus*, 23 September 1940: 9.

49. Broome 1980.

grievances against deteriorating conditions on the reserve, the forcible removal of children and the victimisation of Koories at the hands of a brutal manager.<sup>50</sup> Gunai / Kurnai in Gippsland were also caught up in the collective experience of dispersal and discrimination. Although Susie Murray was born on Lake Tyers, her family were excluded by discriminatory legislation and forced to move to the nearby fringe camp of Toorloo Arm. Doug Nicholls had indeed come to national attention through his sporting prowess but, as we have seen, he was also a leading figure in the Koorie community through his involvement with Aboriginal organisations, the church and social welfare.<sup>51</sup>

As Barthes observes, 'Every photograph is a certificate of presence ... The reading of public photographs is always, at bottom, a private reading'.<sup>52</sup> Over time, the context for this photograph has shifted from the public domain to the world of individual and communal memories. Today each of the eight children born to George and Susie Patten treasure their own personal copies of this photograph as a record of their parents' wedding. Photographs enable us to believe in the past and they verify our contemporary presence. As Macdonald has shown, in Koorie families photographs are 'used to tell ... stories, introduce people to kin, as items of exchange and as important statements of identity and belonging in the spatial and temporal politics of kinship'.<sup>53</sup> When I read this photograph my eye is drawn to the *punctum*<sup>54</sup> – the visual 'accident' that is poignant to me – in this case the cheeky face of the bridesmaid (whom I have not yet been able to identify), peeking excitedly between the bride and groom, looking directly at the camera.

For Herbie Patten this photograph resonates with personal meaning as a symbol of the respectability which his mother Susie Murray held very dear.<sup>55</sup> In a colonial context Christianity fulfilled both a protective and pastoral role that involved civilising and conversion.<sup>56</sup> Bain Attwood's meticulous study of Ramahyuck mission in Victoria has demonstrated that Indigenous identity was historically created and mediated through interaction with missionaries who sought to inculcate the spiritual values which shaped consciousness through a temporal and material ordering of daily existence.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless as Jean and John Comaroff point out in their study of Christian missions in South Africa, Christianity is never a discrete set of beliefs but a contested realm between consciousness and ideology: conversion 'belied the fact that older modes of thought and action were never fully laid aside'.<sup>58</sup> It follows that Christianity did not necessarily erase Aboriginal culture nor the political commitment to Aboriginal restitution and recognition.<sup>59</sup> Attwood points out that through Christian missions Koories 'learned humanitarian and liberal political precepts which gave them the means to publicise

50. Barwick 1972; Goodall 1996: 247-258; Attwood 2003: 31-53.

51. Clark 1975; Horton 1994: 792-3.

52. Barthes 1981: 87, 97.

53. MacDonald 2003: 225.

54. Barthes 1981: 27.

55. Herbie Patten, personal communication, 11 August 2006.

56. Rose and Swain 1988: 1-8.

57. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 78; Attwood 1989.

58. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 247.

59. Rose and Swain 1988: 1-8.

their plight'.<sup>60</sup> Most particularly the evangelical work of men like lay preacher John Green at Coranderrk and Daniel Mathews from the Maloga mission on the Murray River provided Koories with a powerful tool that equipped them in political struggles for recognition. Christian teachings proclaimed the equality of all in the eyes of God, regardless of race; they appealed to God as a higher authority, they helped Koories formulate a strong sense of themselves as people with the promise of deliverance as God's children through 'a prophetic and predictive' sense of history providing the hope of salvation and they introduced the idea of British democracy and their rights and equality as citizens within British justice.<sup>61</sup> It deserves mention however that the colonial government failed to grant political recognition except on the basis of a Christianised Aboriginality.

### Respectability and gender

Historian Tim Rowse suggests that over time, Koories found an honourable means of establishing status and respect within the constraints imposed by a colonial regime as a survival strategy.<sup>62</sup> But the issue of respectability raises gender issues. As the hub of Aboriginal families, women would inevitably be a focus of attention for government authorities and humanitarians. In her research on Koorie history, Barwick reported that, as result of mission influences and the changing structure of Aboriginal society Koorie women had gained considerable equality and autonomy. The ladies 'most eagerly attended' embroidery and dressmaking classes and with the money earned from their industry Coranderrk women 'dressed with remarkable elegance' such that visitors 'repeatedly commented that their homes and furnishings were equal ... to those of "English workingmen" and superior to those of many small farmers in the district'.<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere Barwick describes the intimacy and 'genuine camaraderie' that prevailed in the relationships between Koorie women and missionaries' wives at Acheron and Coranderrk. However Barwick's descriptions are in marked contrast to the picture of gender relations elsewhere on the frontier. Indeed 'any claim of a "sisterhood" between white women and Aboriginal women is historically discredited by the cruelty, violence and racism experienced by many Aboriginal women at the hands of white women'.<sup>64</sup> It may well be that the historical context in which Barwick worked within emerging feminist ideologies led her to exaggerate the level of Indigenous transformation. In response to these debates Lydon suggests that the gender relationships between missionaries' wives and Aboriginal women may have been more complex than Barwick realised: while associations between Aboriginal women and white women might involve 'companionship and cooperation', white women also operated as 'agents of colonial control'.<sup>65</sup> And we need to remember that the church also lent support for the removal of children from their families, forced marriage and the break-up of communities.<sup>66</sup>

60. Attwood 2004: 6.

61. Attwood 2003: 28.

62. Rowse 2005b: 50.

63. Barwick 1974, 1972: 27-28; 34.

64. Paisley 1997: 114.

65. Lydon 2005: 207.

66. Attwood 1989: 39-40, 55-56; Lydon 2005: 210; Tonkin and Landon 1999: 121.

Nevertheless we do not have to concur completely with Barwick's representation of gender relationships in order to acknowledge the emergence of a matriarchal structure within Koorie society. With men away at work, women were responsible for the protection of children and processes of socialisation, women enjoyed equal importance in new ceremonies of weddings, christenings and funerals and 'eagerly accepted new leadership roles as choir members and organists'.<sup>67</sup> Mapping Barwick's insights onto a Melbourne demographic of the 1940s, Rowse emphasizes the importance of public Aboriginal activities and private family celebrations to promote community solidarity and as a form of social control. Dances, anniversaries and weddings were highly valued as forms of conspicuous consumption among the Cummeragunja community and great pride and respect was given to their appearance and clothing and their good behaviour: 'Organised ... [c]oncert parties, fund-raising dances, work bees and church suppers, barbecues and protest meetings [served] to demonstrate aboriginal skills and solidarity to whites and encourage a sense of community membership among the participants'.<sup>68</sup> Above all, Koories said, these activities were intended to 'keep our people together' and to 'show those gabas what dark people can do'.<sup>69</sup>

In her extended analysis of Christian weddings at Coranderrk, Lydon points that Koorie women commissioned photographs of their weddings as an essential souvenir, to recall the event and as proof of respectability within assimilation paradigms.<sup>70</sup> Aird would concur: with 'the confidence and dignity of people who have succeeded ... [Aborigines] felt a very real need to state their successes in the European community to ensure protection from the oppressive "protection" policies'.<sup>71</sup> Thus the tradition of Aboriginal weddings fulfilled a complex role not just as an important social ritual but also as an expression of Aboriginal sentiment and association within the wider framework of a colonial context concerned with coercion and control.

At the same time the tactile quality of the photograph invokes the mimetic character of colonial contact. Pursuing this argument Michael Taussig suggests that modernity's concern with visibility is exemplified by the camera's mimetic impulse through the representation of alterity.<sup>72</sup> Building on these debates Homi Bhabha examines the play of representations embodied in mimicry as a key strategy of the desire 'for a reformed recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite'.<sup>73</sup> As Lydon points out, these strategies reflect a fundamental colonial ambivalence demonstrating the instability and internal contradictions within colonial discourse.<sup>74</sup> But difference could also operate as a counter colonial strategy: in their political activities Doug Nicholls and activist and entrepreneur Bill Onus 'invoked difference ... as part of a strategy to gain the same rights as other Australians'.<sup>75</sup>

67. Rowse 2005b: 55–6.

68. Barwick 1964: 29–30.

69. Barwick 1964: 30.

70. Lydon 2005: 209.

71. Aird 1993: vii.

72. Taussig 1993: 25.

73. Bhabha 1984: 126; see Rowse 2005a: 18 and 2005b: 54.

74. Lydon 2005: 7.

75. Attwood cited by Rowse 2005a: 18.

### Aboriginal involvement in the Australian military forces

The photograph of the wedding of George Patten and Susie Murray is also crucially important because it documents a moment in time in the history of Aboriginal involvement in the Australian military forces. Historical photographs play a vital role in the recovery of these hidden histories and this photograph is reproduced in the book *Forgotten heroes* by Alick Jackomos and Derek Fowell.<sup>76</sup> With the outbreak of World War II, Aboriginal organisations seized the opportunity to press the government for citizenship rights. They drew attention to the anomaly that Aborigines could enlist and serve their country yet they were not citizens.<sup>77</sup> Koories who served in the war enjoyed positive gains in the form of better health and higher wages and they gained a temporary respite from the racism which prevailed in Australia. When hostilities ended however social relationships reverted back to their former state. Paralleling their experiences in World War I, soldiers found on their return that they were refused entry to hotels and denied status as returned servicemen. On this wedding day of celebration – and protest – no one could have foreseen that the 27 Lake Tyers men, from whom the guard of honour was drawn, who had so proudly volunteered for military service, would be discharged within a year. As far as the military was concerned, Aboriginal involvement in the war was ‘neither necessary nor desirable’.<sup>78</sup> This was a reflection of their own deep-seated racism. Not surprisingly Koories returned to Lake Tyers disillusioned and angry.<sup>79</sup> In this context, the photograph is both poignant and powerful, capturing an occasion for celebration in the political struggles for equality and recognition, a euphoric moment that would soon be swept aside by the force of institutionalised racism.

In an innovative and highly original way, Koories appear to have capitalised on this unique historical moment by appropriating the pomp and status of military ceremonies and, substituting boomerangs for swords, created a synthesis between Indigenous and European traditions. In so doing Koories transformed European traditions in accordance with age-old practices. As Carol Cooper has pointed out, the heavy carved wooden weapons characteristic of the south-east had always fulfilled much more than an economic role, being of symbolic and spiritual significance in ceremonies as a signifier of individual and clan identity.<sup>80</sup> Boomerangs held aloft in ritual contexts figure in a Burbong initiation ceremony by Wailwan at Quambone Station New South Wales recorded by photographer Charles Kerry in 1898. Boomerangs feature in the corroborees depicted by the nineteenth century artists Tommy McRae and William Barak.<sup>81</sup> Through well-established traditional exchange relations Kooris understood the importance of rituals of diplomacy in the negotiation of inter-relationships, and performance features in many accounts of cross-cultural exchange.<sup>82</sup>

76. Jackomos and Fowell 1993.

77. Attwood and Marcus 2004: 22–23.

78. Hall 1997: 8.

79. Hall 1997: 20.

80. Cooper 1981: 32–33.

81. Stephen 2000: 251; Sayers 1994.

82. McBryde 1984; Clendinning 2003; White 1980; Lydon 2005.

## Memorialising Barak

For Koories, boomerangs are an important part of regional heritage, while to members of the dominant culture the boomerang was a unique symbol of national identity.<sup>83</sup> In a highly original way the cultural performances staged by Koories mediate between these two apparently opposed realms. In the process they negotiate new roles and meanings for these artefacts emblematic of Koories' changing circumstances.

The circumstances surrounding the death of the William Barak, artist and *ngurungaeta* or head man for the Kulin people offer an example. During his lifetime William Barak played a key role in his community both as leader for his people in negotiations with the wider community, and as an artist gaining considerable recognition for his drawings of corroborees which drew on childhood memories from an earlier era.<sup>84</sup> Upon his death in 1903, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines unanimously decided that £20 should be put aside for a monument but the Chief Secretary refused to sanction this decision.<sup>85</sup> With the official closure of Coranderrk in 1924 and a growing concern with racial purity, Barak's legacy lapsed into obscurity. In 1934, to coincide with the Victorian Centenary, an official memorial was unveiled in nearby Healesville. This was achieved partly through a public subscription instigated by the *Argus* and the donation of a neo-classical Italian marble gravestone by the philanthropist, pastoralist and long time supporter of the Kulin, Anne Bon<sup>86</sup> (fig 4).

The monument was vandalised in the 1940s and stored by the local council until 1951 when members of the Bread and Cheese Club, a Melbourne literary society, held a working bee to restore the Coranderrk cemetery. Subsequently Barak's memorial was re-erected at the cemetery. I agree with Lydon's analysis of these events: that in the process of 'white forgetting and remembrance, these memorials stood for the death of a people', lending support to colonial myths of the noble savage that represented Barak as 'King Barak, the Last of the Victorian Aborigines'.<sup>87</sup> However an Aboriginal presence was not erased. Billie Russell, a senior member of the Coranderrk community and a descendent of Barak, was invited to be present at the official unveiling of the memorial on 29 May 1935. In the circumstance, we can assume that it was Russell's choice to hold two boomerangs aloft. To members of the dominant culture his presence may have served to reinforce the stereotypical notion of Koories as an atrophied remnant culture doomed to extinction. But for the Koorie community who maintained their ties to Coranderrk, the boomerang was symbolic of Barak's life, his ongoing presence in death and testimony to a continuing Koorie presence.

Contrasts can be drawn here with the metropolitan marriage of George Patten and Susie Murray. Whereas in the photograph of the official unveiling of Barak's memorial the lone figure of Billie Russell is subsumed within the pomp and power of colonial cultural heritage, in the Patten/Murray wedding, where Koories like Doug Nicholls played a key role in the arrangements, a greater degree of autonomy is evident. Boomerangs are pivotal to this performance: at the front of the arch a pair of heavy hunting

83. Jones 1992: 66.

84. Sayers 1994.

85. Kleinert 1994: 60.

86. Kleinert 1994: 61; Lydon 2005: 214-5.

87. Lydon 2005: 215.



Fig 4: Unveiling of the Barak memorial, 27 May 1935. Dreir Collection, Photo by Morwell Hodges, La Trobe Picture Collection, State Library of Victoria

Left to right: fourth Mr Bon, sixth Sir John Macfarland, Chancellor of the University, eighth Billy Russell. Others present but not identified: Reverend Donald Cameron, ex-moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Australia and Dr Baird, Chaplain to the Moderator.

boomerangs from central Australia feature prominently, a homage to a classic Aboriginal culture. Behind, but given equal importance, are pairs of painted boomerangs like those produced by Gunai/Kurnai at Lake Tyers Aboriginal station for a local tourist industry. To complete her bridal outfit, Susie Murray wears a miniature boomerang on a ribbon from her waist, in effect articulating the symbolic relationship between a personal sense of cultural identity and a wider public sphere.<sup>88</sup>

### Lake Tyers boomerangs

Tourism developed at Coranderrk and Lake Tyers in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. This was a response to a growing fascination on the part of an urbanised populace for a unique experience of an exotic 'primitive other', conflated with the picturesque natural beauty of the Dandenong Ranges and the Gippsland Lakes popularised through the photography of Nicholas Caire. Although tourism has generally received bad press, it is more productively seen as an important form of cross-cultural exchange. In the late nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century many hundreds of tourists visited Coranderrk and Lake Tyers particularly during the summer months. At Lake Tyers visitors were taken on a tour of the reserve, they listened to a concert and a performance by the Lake Tyers gum leaf band, they witnessed demon-

<sup>88</sup>. Stewart 1994: 37-65, 132-139.

strations of boomerang throwing and fire lighting and had the opportunity to purchase a boomerang, as a souvenir of their visit.<sup>89</sup> Although some residents at Coranderrk and Lake Tyers resented the intense curiosity and uncouth behaviour of tourists,<sup>90</sup> at Lake Tyers the income received from the production of artefacts (between 5 and 10 shillings for a boomerang) far exceeded the monthly wage paid by the manager. For many decades, managers at Lake Tyers tried unsuccessfully to reduce the hours that tourists were allowed to visit the reserve on the moral grounds that Gunai/Kurnai earned money too easily from the production of tourist artefacts.<sup>91</sup> Managers tended to blame tourists for the growing discontent among 'inmates'. Like managers at Coranderrk<sup>92</sup> they refused to acknowledge the growing historical consciousness of Koories and their ability to independently initiate acts of local resistance. By the 1950s managers' wishes were realised and tourists were excluded altogether.

As an innovative and highly original response to a local tourist industry, parallels exist between the Lake Tyers boomerangs and the painted artefacts produced by Arrernte at the Hermannsburg mission in the late 1930s. As Ian Burn and Ann Stephen argue the painted boomerangs and spearthrowers produced by Albert Namatjira and other Arrernte artists are structurally ambiguous, at once artefact and art object they resonate with multiple meanings expressive of a radically new context.<sup>93</sup> Similarly the painted boomerangs from Lake Tyers are hybrid objects simultaneously transposing traditional imagery into a new context and reappropriating images from the dominant culture. While there are historical and individual differences, it is possible to discern a number of discrete elements in the visual imagery on the Lake Tyers boomerangs: geometric clan designs once found on possum skin cloaks and dendroglyphs, paired birds on a leafy twig symbolising the Kurnai gender totems, *yirung* (emu-wren), representing men and *djitgun* (superb wren) representing women and, at the apex of the boomerang, red and blue ensigns and the Australian coat of arms — expressive of Koories' political struggles for equality and recognition. In her study of tourism in Africa, Bennetta Jules-Rosette found that the meanings generated by tourist art follow a cyclic pattern: commodities embody particular values for the community concerned, in exchange they signal a further range of meanings and in turn, Indigenous producers respond to, and mirror, the expectations of consumers.<sup>94</sup> Thus the innovative artefacts produced by Gunai/Kurnai at Lake Tyers in response to the interests of tourists fulfilled multiple roles, entangled in the dialogue created by cross-cultural exchange and meaningful to both Koories and members of wider community on multiple levels.

### *Corroboree Season 1949*

Art historian Ian McLean draws attention to the conscious shift in strategy which took place in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s as Aboriginal political struggles for equality and recognition began to adopt a deliberately cultural strategy.<sup>95</sup> At the same time the ideas of

89. Kleinert 1994: 105–135.

90. Pepper and Araugo 1985: 205; Lydon 2005: 178–9.

91. Kleinert 1994: 133–8.

92. Lydon 2002: 82.

93. Burn and Stephen 1992.

94. Jules-Rosette 1984: 225–6.

95. McLean 1998: 104.

the clergyman and anthropologist AP Elkin, who led the development and implementation of assimilation policies, reflected a shift in emphasis away from genetics towards cultural values.<sup>96</sup> In Aboriginal culture, performance fulfils a vital role as form of ritual diplomacy expressive of the formal relationships between various groups. In cross-cultural exchange the theatrical space of performance creates an opportunity for increased knowledge and understanding, even reciprocity. In the early twentieth century, the ethnographer AW Howitt commented favourably on the quality of mimicry, song and dance evident in the rituals he recorded.<sup>97</sup>

Over time Koories found it impossible to maintain a full ceremonial life and corroborees were transformed into theatrical spectacles. At the level of everyday life, however, concerts fulfilled a central role in the activities of Koorie communities as 'a new kind of corroboree, a new kind of communal gathering'.<sup>98</sup> Margaret Tucker's minstrel singers from Cummeragunja performed for tourists on the Murray River and in fund-raising concerts in Melbourne while Doug Nicholls' weekly visits to Jackson's Track broadcast concerts on radio. The political nature of these concerts as cultural performances cannot be overlooked. On 24 January 1937 members of the Australian Aborigines League were invited to participate in the Australia Day celebration of John Batman's founding of Melbourne but they found Aboriginal people relegated to the realm of prehistory as the precursors to white settlement. Protesting their cause, on 31 May 1937, members of the Australian Aborigines League sponsored a concert at the Australian church in Russell Street, Melbourne thereby anticipating the Day of Mourning staged in Sydney the following year.<sup>99</sup>

The series of Corroboree pageants sponsored by the Australian Aborigines League staged at Wirth's Olympia, Melbourne from 1948 onwards witnessed the transformation of a Koorie concert tradition into professional entertainment (fig 5). By the late 1940s, after a decade of political activism, Bill Onus, President of the Australian Aborigines League, came to the realisation that individual Aborigines such as Reg Saunders, the first commissioned Aboriginal officer; the artist Albert Namatjira; the actor Robert Tudawali — star of the film *Jedda* — and the singer Harold Blair who had achieved success in their own fields had the potential to change public opinion towards Aborigines. In the program for the *Corroboree Season 1949* Onus stated that 'For many years we have endeavoured to obtain full citizen rights for all aborigines throughout Australia but our pleas have been left unanswered'. Onus was convinced that 'the best way of [Aborigines] getting recognition was to present them culturally to the public'.<sup>100</sup> Billed as a 'weird, wild [and] picturesque' event *Corroboree Season 1949* promised an evening of 'tribal ritual dances, boomerang throwing, fire lighting, roping, whip cracking, gum leaf band, choir, comedians, vocalists and other novelties'. This extraordinary array of events drew upon Koories' diverse historical experiences from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, experience in the pastoral industry, on government reserves and popular culture.

<sup>96.</sup> McGregor 2005.

<sup>97.</sup> Howitt 1904: 423-4, 532-534.

<sup>98.</sup> Clark 1975: 38.

<sup>99.</sup> Atwood 2003: 71-74.

<sup>100.</sup> *Corroboree Season 1949*, Wirth's Olympia, Melbourne, Lin Onus Collection.

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Fig 5: Corroboree, Wirth's Olympia, 1949, Collection Lin Onus, Reproduced courtesy of the Onus family.

By contrast with this evident hybridity, the poster advertising *Corroboree Season 1949* appropriated an image of classic Aboriginality drawn from the very popular *Walk-about* magazine, published from 1935 to 1974 by the National Travel Association with funds from the federal government to promote tourism within Australia. In recent years the construction of Aboriginality through colonial discourse as an essentialising stereotype of the noble savage has been widely critiqued. But in this context there can be no question of colonial domination. Rather the photograph of the central Australia tribal Aborigine must be seen as a form of 'strategic essentialism'<sup>101</sup> – a deliberate and conscious use of an image immediately recognisable to both black and white Australians. The play of Aboriginalities evident in the presentation and performance of *Corroboree Season 1949* as an affirmation of both a distinctive regional identity and an emerging pan-Aboriginality points to the tensions which exist between more symbolic constructions of Aboriginality at the public level and the more situational and heterogeneous constructions of Aboriginality at the personal level.<sup>102</sup>

### *An Aboriginal Moomba*

In 1951 Doug Nicholls openly criticised the Melbourne City Council's exclusion of a Koorie presence from the nation's 50th anniversary celebrations: 'Our voice, long silent is now raised against the exclusion of Old Australians from the Jubilee celebrations'.<sup>103</sup> Nicholls threatened to call another day of mourning. He envisaged that this would be held on the banks of the Yarra River and would re-enact John Batman's signing of the treaty with local Aboriginal elders – a treaty which Koories held in high esteem as confirmation of their traditional ownership of land. One perceptive newspaper editor observed that Nicholl's proposal displayed 'an extraordinary sense of ritual'.<sup>104</sup> Nicholls further suggested that 'Aboriginal art could be represented by Albert Namatjira' and he proposed a 'boomerang throwing display' and a 'large corroboree'.<sup>105</sup>

Nicholl's protest won the support of the organising committee and with funding of £2000 and the services of a director, scriptwriter and designer, *An Aboriginal Moomba* was staged at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne (fig 6). Unlike *Corroboree Season 1949* the program for *An Aboriginal Moomba* was divided into two parts, the Past and the Present. The first half dramatised Aboriginality in terms of a romantic and primitivist ideal of tribal life relaying the myth of Toolaba and concluding with 'tribesmen march[ing] forward into the sun'.<sup>106</sup> In the second half, billed as 'a Tableau of Progress', Koories aimed to show that they had maintained 'their inherent characteristics of courage, endurance and imagination [whilst they] adapted themselves to the new customs and culture of white people'.<sup>107</sup> The all-Aboriginal cast played before a backdrop which reproduced a landscape by Namatjira and was flanked either side by the intricate geometric designs found on the carved trees or dendroglyphs unique to the south-east.

101. Russell 2001: 64.

102. Beckett 1988: 4.

103. Attwood 2003: 196.

104. Attwood 2003: 196.

105. Attwood 2003: 196.

106. Attwood 2003: 196; Kleinert 1999.

107. Kleinert 1994: 221.



Fig 6: Cast of *An Aboriginal Moomba*, Princess Theatre Melbourne, 1951, Photo J. Hauer, Reproduced courtesy of the Arts Centre, Performing Arts Collection, Melbourne and the Onus and Nicholls families.

Dressed in a hybrid mix of traditional tribal costume and modern evening dress, the performers appear to slip easily between the apparently divided realms of 'primitive' and 'civilised' with traditional and contemporary cultural forms coexisting in a fluid assertion of identity.

*An Aboriginal Moomba* had an extraordinary impact on Melbourne's Koorie community, contributing to a new historical consciousness. Doug Nicholls would later reflect, 'We began to realise ... that we should be proud of our Aboriginal culture — that we should remember we were a great people'. He came to the realisation that 'We've been missing out because we've lost the interests of our own hearts ... Instead of teaching ourselves about ourselves, we've been studying whites'.<sup>108</sup> Nicholl's recollection of the impact created by *An Aboriginal Moomba* tallies with Fred Myers' analysis of the role played by performance in formations of cultural identity. Myers suggests that 'For both indigenous performers and their audience participants [cultural performances provide an important context] for the contemporary negotiation and circulation of indigenous peoples' identities': a form of 'culture-making', or more particularly, 'becoming Aboriginal'.<sup>109</sup> In this context the photograph of the performance resonates with additional levels of meaning for individuals and their kin as a palpable historical record negotiating between private and more public experiences of Aboriginality. In my experience such historical photographs act in a cyclic way as a catalyst for oral history, as an alternative space of enunciation between memory and history, a third

<sup>108.</sup> Clark 1975: 157.

<sup>109.</sup> Myers 1994: 679.

space that incorporates both the emotive power of memory and the factual evidence of an historical event.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have examined a group of Koorie photographs taken in Melbourne and its immediate environs during the period of 'high assimilation' from the late 1930s to 1970. In my selection I deliberately chose not to reproduce negative images which represented Koories through racially inscribed paradigms. Instead I have sought to focus on positive images of Aboriginality previously overlooked. Within the opportunities and limitations imposed by assimilation policies, these photographs testify to a resilient and dynamic Koorie presence in the city, actively engaged in formations of cultural identity in dialogue with a colonial culture.

Contrasts can be drawn between the various photographs indicative of their particular context and the various registers in which they can be understood. A colonial ambivalence is indeed contained within what Taussig terms 'the very act of colonial mirroring' expressive of the tensions and contradictions that prevail in settler societies.<sup>110</sup> In one sense the photographs apparently confirm the success of the colonial project: Koorie identities are seen to be historically created and mediated through the historical experience of assimilation. Yet Koories are also engaged in political struggles for recognition and equality. Most importantly, the photographs validate the self-perception of Koories themselves: Koories are 'reformed and given substance through photos'.<sup>111</sup> As Macdonald explains:

For ... Kooris photo[graphs] mark a divide in their history of colonisation. They moved from myth, whose conditions of existence were swept from their control ... [But t]hey were denied a part in Australia's historical narrative: as ahistoricised people who had 'lost' their traditions and 'failed' to become the citizens expected of them ... [Photographs] mediated the void left by this absence of myth and history.<sup>112</sup>

Because photographs have a unique capacity to verify the past which might otherwise remain unknown or distorted by colonial narratives, they are crucial to formations of cultural identity. Constructions of Aboriginal identity will inevitably be contingent and contested, 'subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power'.<sup>113</sup> As an alternative space of enunciation, photographs mediate between memory and history: identifying points of difference between the past and the present and bringing the past into the present as witness to collective historical experiences.

Shaped through the exchange between black and white, photographs are seen to fulfil a performative role. In the performance of Aboriginality, Koories reclaim past traditions, and they appropriate from the frameworks of colonial power evident in the heraldic symbols of a young nation and the essentialising constructions of Aboriginality implied in colonial discourses, to carve out new, hybrid formations of identity in relation to regional affiliations and a nascent pan-Aboriginality. The ritual staging of

110. Taussig 1993: 25.

111. Macdonald 2003: 239.

112. Macdonald 2003: 239.

113. Hall 1990: 225.

Koorie culture mediated between these apparently opposed domains and in the process negotiated new roles and meanings for Koorie identities emblematic of their changed political, economic and social circumstances. Such a process of creative synthesis in the pervasive arena of mundane culture bears witness to Koories' reformulation of their social identity and material existence within the constraints of assimilation.

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