ABORIGINAL HISTORY

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Aboriginal History Monograph Series
Preface

This volume includes four fascinating articles each exploring indigenous history in rich, new ways. Tracey Banivanua Mar’s analysis of three moments of Indigenous protest in Tahiti, Victoria and New Zealand presents a new transnational history of indigenous political agency in the 1840s. Their significance, she argues, lies not in whether they succeeded or failed in preventing the spread of European colonisation, but instead in the way in which the various indigenous leaders – Queen Pomare, Billibellary, and the Maori Confederacy – adapted Imperial discourses, for instance on ‘protection’ and ‘sovereignty’, to articulate their own demands, and thus reveals a shared, transnational political consciousness. In his study of British explorers’ encounters with Indigenous people in Queensland, Michael Davis analyses the interplay and connections between Indigenous knowledge and western ideas about the local environments. Whilst acknowledging that tension, misunderstanding and conflict marked these early cross-cultural encounters, his research also reveals that such encounters resulted in trade, exchange, and communication, and produced new forms of colonial knowledge about natural ecology and Indigenous economies. Liz Conor offers a fresh new perspective on our understandings of cross-cultural gender relations by tracing the ‘black velvet’ trope which characterised settler ideas about Aboriginal women in Northern Australia, and finding that it exclusively pertained to white men’s sexual relations with Indigenous women. By contrasting the alarmist colonial discourses which demonised Asian-Aboriginal relations, Conor finds that the ‘black velvet’ trope affirmed Anglo-Australian male perceptions of proprietary ownership over the female Aboriginal body. Lastly, John Maynard’s study of Percy Haslam, an amateur enthusiast of the Awabakal language and culture, provides new insights into the way in which unique individuals such as Haslam, shaped by their own personal histories with Aboriginal communities, amassed important archives at a time when professional academics had little interest in Indigenous culture, which, in this instance, enabled the revitalisation of the local language. In the Notes and Docs section Colin Dyer has contributed a new resource for researchers by translating the nineteenth-century French traveller, Eugène Delessert’s observations of Aboriginal people and culture, based on his visit to Sydney in 1844-45.

Finally, Volume 37 includes Karen Hughes’ obituary of the highly-respected elder Thomas Edwin Trevorrow who was instrumental to both the Ngarrindjeri and broader South Australian communities.

Shino Konishi
Imperial literacy and indigenous rights: 
Tracing transoceanic circuits of a modern discourse

Tracey Banivanua Mar

In 1838, amidst French imperial aggression in Tahiti, the reigning Indigenous monarch Queen Pomare wrote the first of many letters as a ‘sister Queen’ to Britain’s Queen Victoria. In it she asserted her and her people’s right to seek the protection of the British government who, after all, had brought colonisation to her shores. Two years later, Wurundjeri elder Billibellary, counselled a gathering of his clanspeople on a newly selected site of residence in Narre Narre Warren, a few miles remote from the burgeoning British settlement of Melbourne. Following his reportedly spirited address, he and other residents walked off the Narre Narre Warren station in a sovereign withdrawal of cooperation with colonial authorities. Earlier that same year, a few thousand miles to the east of Melbourne at Waitangi in Aotearoa New Zealand, a gathering of Maori chiefs walked out on treaty negotiations with a British delegation. Although some would eventually sign what became known as the Treaty of Waitangi, others permanently withdrew their consent and refused the British appropriation of full sovereignty over Maori land and its inseparable people. This article argues that these seemingly isolated moments of protest constitute the observable tip of a wider process underway within many indigenous communities in the late 1830s and 1840s.

The three moments of protest in 1840 did little in the long-term to stop the approaching waves of colonisation that radiated from Pacific rim colonies to engulf the entire oceanic region. By the end of the decade land and gold rushes in these rim colonies entrenched colonisation throughout the Pacific region as an expectation rather than potential. Settler-colonialism in particular, though an experimental and tentative idea in the 1830s, had solidified into a self-conscious and self-governing phenomenon in the Australasian colonies and many parts of the Pacific by mid-century. But success or failure in deflecting colonisation may not be where the potential significance of these protest moments lies. Viewing them with a wider-angled lens, this article suggests that their historical significance lies in indigenous leaders’ adaptations of an imperial discourse that was dynamically articulating notions of ‘protection’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘land’ in the early to mid-century. These imperial discourses can be viewed as the connective tissue that underpinned a developing consciousness amongst the original inhabitants of the region. Moreover, as this article explores, the extensive mobility of indigenous peoples and colonial traders, missionaries and
settlers in the first half of the nineteenth century is an important framework for understanding what was arguably an emerging intellectual and discursive circuitry. In this wider context, isolated protest can arguably be re-viewed in terms of their shared patterns and contributions to emerging counter-imperial discourses on native rights.

The south-eastern Australian colonies, Aotearoa New Zealand, and Tahiti were interlinked colonial ‘nodes’ in the 1840s that connected an expanding and thickening British web of interests in land and labour throughout the Pacific. By the 1840s they were bustling sites of interdependent imperial proselytising, trade and settlement that imposed intensifying pressure on indigenous peoples. In turn indigenous peoples continued to adapt varied local forms of political management to meet the increasingly insatiable imperial hunger for land, labour, resources and territory. This interdependence is beginning to be more widely acknowledged in historical understandings of the region. Nevertheless, the potential for them to have been linked by intellectual, political and discursive threads in the same way that they were physically linked by imperial markets, bodies and trade has not been thoroughly explored. The roots of this neglect may well lie in the distinct circumstances and periods of colonisation across the three sites.

In some ways the colonisation of the Australian colony of Port Phillip, Tahiti and Aotearoa New Zealand could not be more different. Port Phillip was obtained by British settlers without serious legal recourse to prior indigenous title; New Zealand was annexed to Britain only after decades of informal colonialism and trade with whalers, sealers and independent settlers from New South Wales; and British-dominated Tahiti, with its close economic and missionary links with New South Wales and New Zealand, was obtained by France in an anti-British act of imperial brinkmanship. Each acquisition was rooted in disparate expressions of ever-adaptable colonial legal apparatuses, and in accordance with matching constructions of the racially distinct abilities of Aboriginal, Polynesian and Maori peoples. With implications for the speed and brutality with which colonisation would proceed, these distinct circumstances impacted the capacity and form of indigenous political organisation across the three sites. Historical analyses of colonial experiences in each site has understandably emphasised differences. Moreover the national borders of the late twentieth century have tended to dominate historical perceptions of the nineteenth-century Pacific world more widely. While such attention to difference is warranted, so too is the neglected acknowledgment that the colonial world of the Pacific and its rim was not made up of mutually exclusive sites of colonial activity. Rather it was an interlinked, interdependent and highly contingent world of shared markets, trades and desires. In the case of Tahiti, Port Phillip and Aotearoa in the 1830s

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1 For two recent examples and historiographies see Thomas 2012; Matsuda 2012.
2 For survey of the distinct legal foundations of colonial powers throughout the Pacific see Banner 2007.
3 For an early but transformative critique of the tendency to reduce Pacific history to its isolated micro-states see Hau’ofa 2008.
and 1840s the colonial forces impacting indigenous peoples in each site were translocal. Each was partly shaped by the experiences of the other, as well as the new exploitation of indigenous Australians, Tahitians, Maori and other Pacific Islanders’ trade, labour and resources mutually ensured the viability of colonial activity in each place.4

With the benefit of hindsight, colonialism in and around the Pacific was inevitable, if not settled, by the 1840s. Many indigenous peoples, however, still related to the imperial world at this time as sovereign peoples, albeit within widely varied constraints. As the three examples explored in this article indicate, archival records of indigenous protests, though sparse, remain indicative of a widespread expectation that colonisation could be contained, if not stopped, by the rights and sovereignty of native peoples. As the reference list for this article exemplify, much historical recognition of this activity has considered such protests in nationally-focused histories on either Australia, New Zealand or Tahiti. Historical indigenous protest therefore retains an aura of having been intensely local and constrained by the isolation and containment imposed during the height of colonial power.

Because of the frequently counter-imperial, suppressed or subversive nature of indigenous political activity, it is difficult to explore with certainty the extent to which it was informed, politically conscious or global. At the best of times, tracking transnational networks and circuits is an archive-intensive project that thrives on physical or hard networks through which the transmission of people, bodies and kin, ideas, discourse, and information can be tracked. The most relevant examples here are the imperial networks traced by Antoinette Burton, Alan Lester and Tony Ballantyne, which left archival traces in institutional records, newspapers or letters mapping the flow of settler, humanitarian, or racial ideas.5 But the empire’s indigenous webs tend to flash in and out of the archival record. The links, connections and networks we seek to track were often subversive, frequently interrupted, and deliberately kept private from the imperial record. With such fleeting appearances, as Daniel Richter has demonstrated, sometimes only inference and the imagination, albeit consistent with available empirical evidence, can foreground indigenous peoples’ historic thoughts, emotions, desires, anger and intentions.6

A growing number of studies based in the twentieth century, however, demonstrate useful models for working with limited archival collections. John Maynard, Ravi de Costa, and Fiona Paisley, for example, have explored transoceanic engagements between Indigenous Australians and the rest of the world in the twentieth century.7 Internationally too, Elleke Boehmer and Elizabeth Elbourne have paid increasing attention to conceptualising transcolonial indigenous networks that were by nature subversive, dangerous, resource-
limited, and fragmented over time. In these examples discourse, terminology, concepts and sentiment are an underlying, and not always emphasised, means of demonstrating the existence of counter-imperial and indigenous circuitry beyond mere physical or institutional contact.

The models offered by studies of more recent indigenous networks are useful references for exploring the translocal dimensions of indigenous protest in the early nineteenth century. During this time such disparate moments of protest as those in Tahiti, Port Phillip and Aotearoa were limited in the archival record to isolated flash points recorded for the purposes of colonial administration. Emphasis is therefore given in this article to exploring the shared expression and conceptual basis of each moment within their wider historical landscape. Juxtaposed against the wider context of a physically linked colonial world common if sometimes fleeting and ephemeral circuitry can be glimpsed. Unlike the hard and structural networks of empire that can be traced through the permanent, readable and constant infrastructure of global organisations or publications, however, such subaltern and indigenous circuitry invokes what Lester has described as transnational ‘processes’. In a subtle analysis he has argued that imperial networking, particularly indigenous networking, should be seen as a process where connectivity might be visible only as shared or contingent trajectories rather than hard-wired networks. Such connectivity might be more subtly understood as connections in any given moment that are yet to be made, lost and made again; juxtapositions yet to flower; or moments of contact that are, by force of historical context provisional, contingent, or fleeting. In the following study it is therefore argued that the parallel imperial discourses – constituted by both language and actions – with which indigenous leaders engaged in these moments of protest in 1840 was not the product of mere coincidence. Viewed from the perspective of a physically connected colonial world, it is argued that these protests exemplify a new imperial literacy. It was a literacy that went beyond letters and numbers to a proficiency in concepts which, in turn, emerged from deeper counter-imperial processes.

Queen Pomare: Imperial literacy and networks of ‘protection’

From the late eighteenth century, the island of Tahiti, and its port of Papeete, was deeply integrated in the tentative reach of British influence in the Pacific. The penal colony at Port Jackson, for example, heavily relied on the agricultural produce traded by Tahitians. So too a new brand of British evangelicals had established a Protestant base in and around Tahiti at the end of the eighteenth century and thoroughly entangled themselves in local politics and governance. By 1815 the Pomare family established a monarchy and stabilised traditional rule with a kingdom based in scriptural laws. Closely aligned with the British

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missions, when two French Catholic priests attempted to land in Tahiti in 1836, they were firmly ejected by the then reigning Queen Pomare.\textsuperscript{10} The French retaliated. They sent an armed vessel from Peru to Papeete in 1838 demanding that the Queen issue a formal apology to the King of France, hoist the French flag with a 21 gun salute, and pay a fine of 2,000 dollars. The inference of aggression was clear. If Pomare did not pay the fine, France would assert control and sovereignty over Tahiti.

Shocked by French aggression, Queen Pomare turned to the British government expressing confidence that ‘my friend [Queen] Victoria … will not cast me off in my troubles’.\textsuperscript{11} She overtly expected that British military protection against French aggression would be forthcoming, and wrote to Queen Victoria that it was the British who had opened the way to this new world of civilised aggression. ‘[S]ince the first Englishman neared our shores’ she wrote, the British:

opened to us two new entrances to two new worlds … with the assistance of Jesus Christ and the paternal care of the missionaries, we may hope to secure one of these worlds; [but] the other in which civilization leads us into, begins to embitter our life, and will ultimately deprive us even of the dominion of the graves of our ancestors.\textsuperscript{12}

Between 1838, when Pomare first wrote to Queen Victoria, and the mid-1840s when she eventually relented to French claims of sovereignty over Tahiti, Pomare and her supporting chiefs wrote numerous petitions, manifestos and appeals to the British and French monarchs. Although she explicitly sought advice on British law and protocols from the British admiralty, consular staff and missionaries resident in Tahiti, the British Foreign Office was repeatedly assured that Pomare’s letters, words, and expressions were her own and not dictated by others. As the British Consul insisted in 1844 her letters reflected her personal qualities of being ‘quiet and dignified’ with ‘a strong mind [that] feels deeply what she says or writes’.\textsuperscript{13}

In directly addressing European monarchs Pomare based her right to do so on her equal status as a ‘sister’ monarch, but also as a woman and a mother.\textsuperscript{14} In November 1843 when she addressed Queen Victoria simply as ‘Victoria, the Sovereign of Britain’ in reference to her normal expression of ‘friend’ or ‘sister’, she explained that ‘I am no longer called a sister, because my lands have been

\textsuperscript{10} For more on the 1819 law code, based on the Ten Commandments see Gunson 1978: 284.
\textsuperscript{11} Queen Pomare to Captain Tucker, 3 October 1843, Enclosure 3, No. 150, The Honourable Sidney Herbert to Viscount Canning, 21 February 1844, The National Archives of the UK [TNA], FO 534/1 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence.
\textsuperscript{12} Queen Pomare and Chiefs of Tahiti to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, 8 November 1838, Enclosure 3, No. 67, Mr Consul Pritchard to Viscount Palmerston, 9 November 1838, TNA, FO 534/1 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence.
\textsuperscript{13} No. 275, Mr Consul-General Miller to the Earl of Aberdeen, 4 November 1844, TNA, FO 534/2 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence ‘Private and Confidential’.
\textsuperscript{14} See for more on this: O’Brien 2006: 108.
seized by the Admiral of France’.\(^{15}\) Her dispossession, she said, had reduced her status from one of equality with the British Queen. So too in 1844 she addressed the King of France with a manifesto demanding he retract a treaty ceding Tahitian sovereignty to the French because it had been forced under threat of violence. In doing so, and as Pomare herself was ‘near giving birth to another child’ she appealed to his justice and good faith, and asked that he see her as both a monarch and a woman like his ‘pious’ Queen and mother of his children.\(^{16}\) In emphasising both her equality and gendered humanity, Pomare had not sought British ‘protection’ on the basis of Tahitian subordination or inferiority. She had done so instead on an assumption that ‘protection’ was what the British owed as friends and as a debt for ushering in that which, as she put it in 1838, had embittered Tahitian lives and threatened their domain. The British Foreign Office, however, approached her letters as an offer of cession to the British Crown, one which they rejected as ‘dangerous and impolitic’.\(^{17}\)

Like the moments of protest in Port Phillip and Waitangi in the surrounding years, Pomare’s campaign to resist colonisation was ultimately unsuccessful. But in protesting she left an archival trail that testifies to her conscious use of existing, and new transoceanic networks. Frequent consultations between Pomare and the Tongan monarch Tupou also revealed a keen understanding of French imperial aggression in the Pacific and a wider imperial ‘design’ to also ‘take’ Tonga, the Marquesas and Hawaii. In 1844 Tupou mirrored Pomare when he demanded British protection on the grounds that from ‘the time Captain Cook anchored here we have viewed the English as our friends’.\(^{18}\) These lines of connection between the islands were thus both physical and discursive, as Tupou adopted a similar foundation for expecting British protection. While such circuitry reflected pre-colonial and indigenous lines of trade and genealogical reciprocity between Tahitian, Samoan, Fijian and Tongan islands, they were also grafted on to new imperial networks that were being carved through the Pacific by new trades and an inexorably expanding missionary empire.\(^{19}\) These were themselves reliant on existing indigenous circuits for their expansion, and would extend to connect indigenous worlds of the Pacific and Australia as never before.

In a condition that was somewhat unique to the Pacific experience of colonisation, British missionary and humanitarian networks were amongst the first, and certainly the most robust, imperial networks that structurally linked the Pacific world. The first missionaries, of the London Missionary Society (LMS), landed

\(^{15}\) Petition from Queen Pomare to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, 10 November 1843, No. 151, TNA, FO 534/1 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence.

\(^{16}\) Manifesto of Queen Pomare to King of the French, Enclosure 1, No. 270, Mr Consul-General Miller to the Earl of Aberdeen, 4 November 1844, TNA, FO 534/2 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence ‘Private and Confidential’.

\(^{17}\) Mr Stephen to the Hon W Fox Strangeways, 1 August 1839, No. 70, TNA, FO 534/1 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence.

\(^{18}\) Tubou, King of the Friendly Islands to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, 19 February 1844, Enclosure 2, No. 253, TNA, FO 534/2 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence ‘Private and Confidential’.

\(^{19}\) On pre-colonial trade, language and genealogical circuits throughout the Pacific see Denoon 1997: 96–105; Denoon et al 2000: 37–50.
in the late eighteenth century in Tahiti, with various denominations across the Pacific, New Zealand, and to a lesser extent, Australia. Without state support, as missions would eventually enjoy in settler colonies, these missionary pursuits were intensely dependent on their indigenous hosts. Many arrived in the eastern and southern Pacific into a perfect storm of new colonial trades, new sources of wealth, and the devastation of indigenous populations caused by violence and regular or venereal disease. Population numbers as well as social, gender, economic and agricultural norms were destabilised or destroyed in the first decades of contact with Europe, leaving social fissures and gaps into which missionaries readily poured. In Tahiti, although LMS missionaries floundered on the brink of failure, personal friendships, a steep population decline and dramatic shifts in the political fortunes of the Tahitian elite turned their fortunes. King Pomare II converted in 1812 resulting in widespread conversion by decree of the Tahitian people. As was also the case in New Zealand and throughout Tonga, Samoa, Fiji and Hawai‘i, indigenous leaders and elites found that missionaries were useful as diplomats and were frequently hosted by indigenous communities in return for their political and economic resources in the emerging colonial world.20 In the Australian colonies and the western Pacific, however, indigenous people at first found limited use for missionaries until well into the nineteenth century.21

The Protestant missions and closely related humanitarian movement of the 1830s have been well studied. Amongst the most recent Alan Lester and Zoe Laidlaw have traced the extensive political and discursive networks that established formidable global organisations in the 1830s. Many of these networks were also indigenous. From at least the 1820s missionary societies began using what they called Native Teachers as ‘a means unlimited’ of forming the front line of an expanding Christian frontier.22 From the 1820s, Islander missionaries went from Tahiti to the Society Islands, the Marquesas, the Cooks and Tonga; from the 1830s to Fiji and Samoa; from the 1840s to Melanesian islands in the New Hebrides and New Caledonia; and from the 1870s to the Australian colonies and New Guinea. In New Zealand, the Church Missionary Society schools established in many Maori villages were run by ‘native youths’, and by the 1850s, over 800 ‘native agents’, mostly unpaid, worked for two Protestant missions throughout New Zealand.23 As the frontline of missionary expansion indigenous missionaries were vulnerable. Of around 250 new LMS missionaries sent to New Guinea from Tonga, Tahiti, Fiji, and Samoa between 1871 and 1885 for example, at least 130, along with what Norman Goodall has said was an ‘unknown number’ of wives

21 For a most recent study Mitchell 2011: 1–12.
22 Howe 1984: 120.
and children, died from disease and violence.\textsuperscript{24} This indigenous dimension of the missionary network transmitted and diffused spiritual, cultural and political knowledge in tandem with missionary teachings.\textsuperscript{25}

Despite the diverse experiences and denominations throughout the Pacific and Australian colonies, missionary activity was linked by a common thread throughout the region. From Papeete to Waitangi, and Port Phillip to isolated parts of New South Wales, many indigenous peoples embraced the literacy and numeracy that accompanied the Bible as a means of engaging with the colonial world.\textsuperscript{26} In Tahiti, where a printing press was established in 1817 enabling the printing of Tahitian spelling books and religious pamphlets, Tahitians subsequently sought missionary education as much for its provision of literacy and numeracy, as for its religious content.\textsuperscript{27} Indeed by the 1840s literacy appears to have been established as both the currency of imperial communication in Tahiti, as well as a desirable and entertaining culture. In a letter to the British Consul-General in 1844, for example, the Chiefs of Papenoo on Tahiti requested that the Consul bring them no more letters from the French, for they did not like what they read. In addition, ‘[t]his is another little word:’ they wrote, ‘will you send us a little white paper, pen and ink, for we have no more paper to write letters upon’, something they did as much for entertainment as for communication.\textsuperscript{28}

Elsewhere in the Australian and Pacific colonies literacy and numeracy were also attractive. In New Zealand Maori actively and enthusiastically sought the expertise of missionaries and particularly the skills of literacy and numeracy.\textsuperscript{29} In Tonga too, the Wesleyan printing press produced at least 170,000 (religious) books in Tongan in the first year of operation, which were devoured by a literate Tongan audience.\textsuperscript{30} By 1837 the Secretary of the LMS, Reverend W Ellis stated that in the LMS’ zone of Pacific influence there were ‘78 schools, which contain between 12,000 and 13,000 scholars’.\textsuperscript{31} Even in the Australian colonies where missionaries enjoyed limited success, literacy quickly became a tool of both accommodation and protest for many post-frontier indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{32} By engaging the literacy of the missions in letters, petitions, and other engagements with British administration, indigenous peoples also entered into dialogue with the concepts and customs of imperial humanitarianism.

By 1840 many indigenous peoples throughout the Pacific world had accepted missionaries and their teachings to varying degrees and for varying purposes

\textsuperscript{24} Goodall 1954: 421.
\textsuperscript{27} Howe 1984: 143–145.
\textsuperscript{28} The Chiefs of Papenoo to Mr. Consul-General Miller, 19 September 1844, Enclosure 1, No. 255, Mr Consul-General Miller to Mr Addington, 23 September 1844, TNA, FO 534/2 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence ‘Private and Confidential’.
\textsuperscript{30} Howe 1984: 188; Griffiths 2005: 154–155.
\textsuperscript{31} Evidence of Reverend W Ellis, ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines’, p. 51.
\textsuperscript{32} Van Toorn 2006.
ranging from spiritual to functional; as tools of literacy or vehicles for travel; and as allies and diplomats for political and economic empowerment. But as tools of empowerment, missionary networks and the un-amended discourses that sustained them, were ill-fitting. Indeed their brand of cultural transformation tended to be based in an intolerance that ensured colonialism was thoroughly and culturally insinuated into the lives of indigenous peoples. Epitomising this, in 1837 the LMS reported that all its native mission villages had replaced Islanders’ ‘little contemptible huts along the sea beach’ with ‘neat’ settlements around the central buildings of a chapel, a school-house, a chief and missionary’s house. The latter overlooked rows ‘of white cottages a mile or two miles long, peeping at you … under the splendid banana trees’. This basic model of supporting religious proselytising with an insistent and relentless transformation of indigenous cultural, social and spatial practices into what was viewed as superior and in ‘the European fashion’, was endemic to dominant missionary activity.

Regardless of denomination, the brand of missionary activity that was dominant in Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific was born of a particular social and economic context that equated Christianity with civilisation, and civilisation with European society. Indigenous peoples’ entire social fabric was viewed as being in need of change, for as British humanitarians put it in 1837, ‘true Civilisation and Christianity are inseparable … No man can become a Christian’ it was held ‘without being a Civilised man’. With indigenous societies largely construed as the noble or ignoble antithesis of civilisation, missionary activity was notoriously intolerant of indigenous societies and therefore deeply assimilationist. Missionary Hugh Thomas wrote in 1818 for example that Islanders, in this case Fijians, were ‘the very dregs of Mankind or Human Nature’ and ‘quite unfit to live but far more unfit to die’. To this extent, missionaries both loved and despised those they came to convert and were self-consciously both saviours and destroyers.

The duality of destroying in order to save recurred in British missionary discourse to encapsulate a tension that remained central to the brand of missionary-influenced humanitarianism that ascended to its peak political influence in Britain in the late 1830s. Humanitarian concerns about the treatment of native peoples in the British empire culminated between 1835-37 in the establishment of a British parliamentary Select Committee to inquire into the conditions of Aboriginal people throughout areas of British influence. The committee’s procedures, findings and recommendations were dominated by a transnational network of humanitarians, missionaries, and supporters stationed on most continents and oceans under British influence and anchored by the political influence of Thomas Fowell Buxton. It collated evidence of violent appropriations of indigenous lands, the widespread use of forced labour, and sexual violence against indigenous women and children. The committee’s

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33 Reverend W Ellis, ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines’, p. 56.
34 Reverend W Ellis, ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines’, p. 50.
35 Coates, Beecham and Ellis 1837: 171, 174.
36 Gunson 1978: 197.
findings and recommendations had a deep impact in Britain, and in its aftermath the Aborigines Protection Society (APS) was formed out existing networks in 1837. The period provided an unprecedented opportunity for humanitarians and missionaries to find common expression throughout Australia, the Pacific, North America and southern Africa. It thus gave rise to an influential language of protection that revolved around ideas of the natural and inalienable rights of native peoples on the one hand. But its sting lay in its foundational presumption of the ‘incapacity’ of ‘native inhabitants’ to ‘enforce the observance of their rights’, and Britain’s ‘obligations’ to interfere on behalf of inferior peoples on the other.

The reports and evidence of the Select Committee on Aborigines demonstrated a genuine concern for the fate of native peoples amidst the creeping influence of notions of the fatal impact. It also demonstrated deep disdain for British settlers and traders, and a faith that British sovereign protection against settler greed was the key means of defending indigenous peoples. British sovereignty in this discourse was framed as superior and conducive to the spread of civilisation and Christianity. As such the form of ‘protection’ the Select Committee advised, was deeply interventionist. In the South Sea islands the Committee recommended more rather than less intervention in these ‘Barbary States’, with the appointment of consular agents, British judicial authority and where necessary the acquisition of sovereignty. In colonies already under British dominion such as the Australian colonies, however, the Committee recommended deep intervention in indigenous education and religious instruction overseen by ‘protectors, whose duty it should be to defend them’. Ultimately intervention was framed as a repaid ‘debt’ to displaced and dispossessed native peoples.

Protectionism of the early to mid nineteenth century was at once both anti and pro imperialism. But it embedded a lasting trope of the indivisible rights of native peoples, their ownership of land and their entitlement to compensatory education and religion. With its deeply imperial genealogy, however, it remained distinct from, and at odds with, indigenous peoples’ own language or discourse. Coloured by the prevailing racial filters of nineteenth-century Europe, indigenous peoples figured in protectionist discourse as noble, untutored, and possibly doomed races who could neither be spared colonisation, nor left alone to navigate their own futures. As we can observe from Pomare’s letters, however, this differed from the expressions of indigenous peoples themselves.

In gaining fluency in the imperial language of protection and humanitarianism, indigenous people such as Queen Pomare utilised its vocabulary to articulate

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39 ‘Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines’, p. 3. For a more detailed treatment of protectionism’s multiple trajectories see Lester and Dussart 2008.
40 See the entire ‘Report of the Select Committee on Aborigines’. Exemplary was Bishop Broughton’s Australian evidence when he stated Indigenous people ‘do not so much retire as decay; wherever Europeans meet with them they appear to wear out, and gradually to decay: they diminish in numbers; they appear actually to vanish from the face of the earth’, pp. 10–11.
their own expressions of rights and entitlements arising from colonial encounters. In 1838 and beyond, she adopted this language to challenge French imperialism and call on British obligations. She jettisoned notions of native peoples, and particularly native women’s, innate inferiority and vulnerability. For her there was no mysterious fatal impact behind her need for British protection, but a string of broken promises and military aggression. In calling for protection she and the chiefs who wrote in support of her demands developed their own discursive trajectories, invoking the rights, entitlement and protection that was so dear to humanitarian sentiment, but articulating them with indigenous meanings and expectations. In summoning the concept of ‘protection’, for example, Pomare also noted that Christianity and Civilisation were two worlds introduced uninvited to Tahiti by the British. While Tahitians hoped to harness the benefits of the former through missionaries, the latter remained untamed, troubling, and threatening, and something from which Tahitians now needed the British to shield them. Protection, in other words, was called for from a position of strength, a demand arising from a broken and uninvited promise and, as Pomare would later put it, the resulting ‘cord with which we both are bound’. It was not a duty owed to an inferior peoples. This refusal of colonial and racialised constructions of native inferiority was shared in the words and deeds of indigenous peoples beyond Tahiti’s shores, and in ways that were intrinsically linked.

Billibellary: Indigenous circuits and sovereign articulations

When the district of Port Phillip and settlement of Melbourne was established on Wurundjeri country in the immediate aftermath of the Select Committee’s report and recommendations, an experimental Aboriginal protectorate was imposed. Established in 1839, the protectorate was to be administered by four Assistant Protectors mostly recruited from humanitarian and missionary circles in Britain, and a Chief Protector of Aborigines, George Augustus Robinson. Robinson arrived in Port Phillip from Tasmania, then Van Diemen’s Land. There he had negotiated the conditional surrender of Tasmanian combatants at the end of the Black War and subsequently managed Wybalena, the Aboriginal reserve on Flinders Island that had been established as a new home for the exiled Tasmanians. There, Wybalena residents not only recovered from the traumas of war, but by the late 1830s had begun a literary tradition of petitioning and letter-writing to protest the conditions of their confinement. When taking up his post at Port Phillip in 1839, Robinson took with him a group of Wybalena residents, men and women who were well-travelled, war-weary and experienced in the colonial world, and who Robinson hoped to employ as intermediaries and translators. Robinson and the group travelled separately, with Robinson arriving in Melbourne to find the ‘Van Diemens Land Natives’ already mixing readily with Wurundjeri. A big group had ‘congregated in [Melbourne] in considerable

42 Petition from Queen Pomare to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, 10 November 1843, No. 151, TNA, FO 534/1 Foreign Office: Confidential Print Pacific Islands: Society Islands: Correspondence.
numbers’ and Robinson was delighted that their engagement was ‘of the most friendly character’ and that ‘the Van Diemens Land Natives are … in friendly alliances with the Tribes’ of Port Phillip.

Although initially delighted with the ready alliances that developed between Tasmanians and the Wurundjeri, Robinson would eventually fail to control the contact, and consequently came to resent it. Wybalena residents in Port Phillip continually resisted his attempts to limit their movement. Although Robinson hired out their services to local settlers many, like Peter Bruny, repeatedly absconded to gain independent work or reside with local Koori communities. Robinson eventually deported them from Port Phillip in 1842, but his anxieties during their stay epitomised the importance the colonial administration had begun to place on the regulation of indigenous space, bodies and territory. Moreover the contact was emblematic of the kind of concentric circuits that would link the Wurundjeri’s experiences of colonialism, and in turn Billibellary’s 1840 protest, to a wider imperial world.

The Wurundjeri, and specifically the Woiwurrung clan led by Billibellary, on whose land the settlement of Melbourne had been established, were administered by the Assistant Protector William Thomas. Thomas was a schoolteacher who arrived into his role more or less straight from London and in the first few years after his arrival in Port Phillip, lived and moved with Wurundjeri people, Billibellary among them. He also focused intently on searching for available land that could be reserved for Indigenous settlement, and on which the Wurundjeri and other Kooris could reside. Promoted by the protectorate as a means of isolating Kooris from settler society, the reservation of land was also justified as establishing a contained sedentary population amongst whom the presumed benefits of civilisation and Christianity could be disseminated as it had on the Pacific missions. Thomas’ reports to Robinson show emphatically, that while the suitability of reserved land was to be based on the government requirement of being isolated from and unwanted by settlement, Wurundjeri persistently reframed the requirement to Thomas’ increasing frustration. False starts on land at Arthurs Seat and the surrounds of Melbourne indicated to Thomas and the protectorate that if the land was not significant to, nor culturally appropriate for the Wurundjeri, they could not be compelled to either reside or stay. It was a quiet insistence on the internal autonomy or sovereignty of Wurundjeri over their own mobility, residence and emplacement.

44 Robinson to Superintendent of Port Phillip, relative to V.D.L. natives, 12 December 1839, Public Record Office Victoria [PROV], VPRS 10 1839/325.
45 PROV, VPRS 10 1839/325; Contract of labour for Peter Bruny contained in Robinson to Superintendent of Port Phillip, relative to V.D.L. Natives, 18 December 1839, VPRS 10 1839/334; Hill & Coates to Chief Protector of Aborigines concerning a hired V.D.L. native who absconded, VPRS 10 1841/88.
46 This is explored at length in a comparative analysis of Melbourne in Vancouver in Edmonds 2010.
In 1840 Thomas reported triumphantly to Robinson that the Wurundjeri had chosen a block of land in Narre Narre Warren, an area remote from the Melbourne settlement. He described it favourably as hilly, rangy and unattractive enough that it ‘never can be desired by the squatter or purchaser’ and where ‘the natives will have an undisturbed possession for hunting’.48 Approved of by the Wurundjeri, a small group moved away from Melbourne and on to the block with Thomas. But once established, relations began to sour. Although rations and supplies had been promised by government as part of the establishment of Aboriginal stations and to ensure dependency, it never materialised. Thomas therefore struggled, as he had elsewhere, to keep people on the station and to prevent them from leaving at will to return to Melbourne for much needed work and supplies.

By December 1840 encroaching settler interest in the fertile lands surrounding Narre Narre Warren meant that the station’s boundaries were increasingly construed by Thomas as containment lines that kept Wurundjeri in, rather than settlers out. Resisting the changed emphasis, and in protest against the lack of rations and broken promises, Narre Narre Warren residents met early in December in Thomas’ absence. Following lengthy debate that reached late into the night, Billibellary, both a traditional clan leader or ngurungaeta and a chief negotiator with colonial officials, addressed the group with an argument that ‘was long and no doubt weighty’. Although not there and unable to converse in Indigenous languages anyway, Thomas later reported that ‘evil alarming ideas … was put into their minds’ by Billibellary and he felt that many ‘expected had they remained that they would all have been killed’ by settlers.49 Whether Thomas’ suppositions were correct or not, they nevertheless convey the accumulating depth of feeling, uncertainty and resentment that resided amongst the Wurundjeri after months of repeated and often violent displacement and broken promises.50 Thomas’ letters to Robinson, in which he relays both the dialogue and sentiments of Billibellary and others, reported a growing expressive discontent with the repeated relocation of Kooris from Melbourne, and the related failure of promised rations in the lead up to this December evening.51 The day after Billibellary’s speech many residents were moved to walk off the station, but camped close enough that remaining residents, and Thomas, could still see the smoke from their fires. To Thomas this underscored the Wurundjeri’s insistent autonomy of movement by retaining communication with the residents who remained and partially dissolving the imposed borders of the station.52

48 William Thomas Assistant Protector Westernport District, Narre Narre Warren to G A Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines, 26 September 1840, PROV, VPRS 11 Item 330.
49 William Thomas Assistant Protector Westernport District, Narre Narre Warren to G A Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines, 28 December 1840, PROV, VPRS 11 Item 335.
51 Many of these letters are contained in PROV, Series VPRS 11 Unregistered Inward Correspondence to the Chief Protector of Aborigines. Particularly Items 297, 299, 312, 324, 326, 327, 331, 335, and 363. See also Standfield 2011; Byrt 2004.
52 William Thomas Assistant Protector Westernport District, Narre Narre Warren to G A Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines, 28 December 1840, PROV, VPRS 11 Item 335.
All residents eventually returned to Narre Narre Warren, but the station was eventually abandoned in favour of a block of land preferred by Wurundjeri at Coranderrk. To judge it as a failed strategy however, would ignore its context. The walk-off’s deeper significance potentially lies in its role in a longer campaign waged by Wurundjeri peoples during the 1830s, 1840s and beyond, that sought to assert and maintain their increasingly curtailed rights to manage movement through country. As elsewhere in the Port Phillip district Kooris made good use of the protectorate system and humanitarian networks not just to seek refuge from raging frontier violence, but also to articulate longer-term demands and requests. These overwhelmingly centred on land as a source of sustenance and a precondition for cultural and social privacy, autonomy, and political renewal. Frequent disputes and disagreements between Thomas and Billibellary for example, were not just the result of clashing perceptions regarding who served who. At the heart of repeated refusals to stay in or vacate spaces epitomised by the Narre Narre Warren walk-off, was an insistence that land and space was not just about location and agriculture. Rather, the land had to legitimately belong to its residents, with legitimacy stemming from Indigenous not British legal foundations. As the Wurundjeri repeatedly requested, they wanted ‘land in our own country’. So too, the residing resentment of Billibellary and his supporters caused by the repeated failure of promised rations, suggests these too were approached by Wurundjeri as necessary, even compensatory entitlements, rather than gifts and handouts.

The sentiments of Billibellary and the Wurundjeri were not unique in and around Port Phillip. The Wauthawurrung near Geelong also requested missionary Francis Tuckfield help them secure land of their own so they could be self-sufficient. Indeed throughout the eastern Australian colonies from the 1840s, Aboriginal people either directly requested grants of land, recruited white supporters to convey their desire for land, or directly reoccupied and squatted on land in their country. Forming what Heather Goodall has described as an early land rights movement, such demands for land as both asylum and compensation matured later in the nineteenth century into vibrant cultures of protest and what Richard Broome has called a ‘powerful narrative of entitlement’ in indigenous peoples’ and their supporters’ political engagement with colonial governments. Indeed Indigenous people throughout Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Queensland during the nineteenth century sought various methods of obtaining land for their own social and economic purposes. Later in the nineteenth century colonial governments would increasingly legislate around such spaces so that they operated more like open-air prisons, or ‘carceral archipelagos’ where residence was increasingly prescribed by law. But Aboriginal people

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53 Broome 2005: 34.  
55 Standfield 2012.  
57 Curthoys and Mitchell 2012: 188.  
58 Goodall 1990: 1.  
59 Curthoys and Mitchell 2012: 190.  
60 Blake 1998: 58.
nevertheless continued to frame claims, requests and demands for land, even reserve land, as sites of sovereignty, compensation or asylum. Moreover, as Queensland land claimants put it as late as 1876, they frequently only requested land that ‘we and our ancestors from time immemorial have possessed and used’. 

That Indigenous peoples in the Australian colonies utilised available colonial structures and political avenues to pursue colonial concessions is neither surprising nor remarkable. Numerous scholars, such as Penny van Toorn, Ann Curthoys, Jessie Mitchell and others cited in this article have explored the very active indigenous political and literary history during this period. Yet to be examined however, is whether such activity merely coincided with, or was connected to and informed by similar activity elsewhere. At the very least, we know that the politics of insistence evident in demands for land, and the walk-off protest at Narre Narre Warren occurred in a broader context in which Indigenous people throughout the southern Australian colonies knowingly met the challenges of colonisation. By 1840, for example, Billibellary had already been part of a Kulin nation delegation that met speculator John Batman in 1835. These meetings, Batman later falsely claimed, secured a treaty to the land on which the protectorate of Port Phillip would later be established. Far from a chance meeting, recent historical scholarship has suggested that these meetings were the product of an informed response by Koori people to unfolding conditions to the north in New South Wales, and the south in Van Diemen’s Land. Robert Kenny has argued that trade routes and overland relationships ensured that news from the north travelled to what would be the Port Phillip district. To the south too, sealing communities along the coast worked by Tasmanians, Maori, Tahitians and other Pacific Islanders potentially ensured news of colonial exploits travelled ahead of settlers. In what Rachel Standfield has described as the first recorded protest against the stinginess of colonial freedoms and rations, Billibellary openly compared the administration of the Port Phillip district to the potential promised by Batman. In 1839 when Wurundjeri were being forcibly cleared from the outskirts of Melbourne, he demanded of William Thomas: ‘Why you want Black Fellows away? Plenty long time ago Maregeek [good]. Batman come here. Black Fellows stop long long time. All Black Fellows plenty bread, plenty sugar’. Viewed in the longer and wider duration of consistent political protest, the Narre Narre Warren walk-off takes on a deeper significance as an integral part of a longer engagement with the colonial world that was actively informed by the translocal experiences of indigenous peoples elsewhere.

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62 Attwood 2009.


64 Kenny 2008.

65 This was in response to the expulsion from Melbourne of over 300 Wurundjeri and other Kooris. Thomas to Robinson, 1 January 1840. Cited in Fels 2011: 21.
If Wurundjeri people such as Billibellary were informed by events in other Australian colonies, we should also reflect on the potential connections from further afield. As Lynette Russell has most recently explored in relation to Australia and as others have explored in relation to the rest of the Pacific, maritime industries, missionary pursuits or curiosity led to extensive mobility amongst many indigenous peoples in and throughout the Pacific in the early uncertain decades of the nineteenth century. Some such as the Tasmanian sealer Wore-temoe-terenner, who had been born amongst the Trawlwoolway of Van Diemen’s Land in the 1790s, worked in the Bass Strait in the first decades of the nineteenth century. There she lived with new sealing societies of the Bass Strait and Kangaroo Island that were made up of Maori, Pacific Islander, African American and European men, and Aboriginal and presumably Islander women from Tasmania and the south coast of the Australian mainland. In the 1820s she and three other Aboriginal women worked as far afield as Mauritius where they were stranded for years, but eventually returned to Tasmania via Sydney in 1827. Wore-temoe-terenner’s story distils a wider history. Many Maori, Tahitians and Hawai’ians travelled independently throughout the Pacific, and to New South Wales, Britain, Asia, the United States and South America. Many thousands of others travelled as labourers on the whaling, sealing and trading vessels that criss-crossed the Pacific and Southern Oceans in the early nineteenth century, weaving together ports in New South Wales, Van Diemen’s Land, and the entire southern and south-western Australian coast to bustling ports in New Zealand, Tahiti, Hawai’i and the North and South American coastlines. The maritime industries of the southern seas therefore linked the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans with crews collected from throughout their travels, including African Americans, Indian and south-east Asian indentured labourers, and Aboriginal, Maori and Pacific Islander crews.

We should not, of course, assume that just because maritime workers travelled together they necessarily conversed about anything more meaningful than the weather, diet or everyday functions of maritime labour. But we do know it was linguistically possible to have deeper exchanges. The Pacific’s trade and pidgin languages, for example, grew in currents that flowed from the Caribbean and Atlantic via encounters between English speakers and Indigenous Australians on the coast of New South Wales. Functional words like ‘by-and-by’, ‘savvy’, and ‘plenty’ for much, were common to Caribbean creoles, Pacific Pidgins, Australian Aboriginal English and Torres Strait Islander Broken and were peppered with African inflections. So too, more subtle or emotional terms like ‘picanniny’ for child, ‘bra’ or ‘brother’ for male peer, or ‘shame’ show direct linguistic links between Jamaica, the Bahamas, Hawai’i, New South Wales and

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66 Russell 2012; Samson 2010; Pybus 2006; Thomas 2012.
68 Chappell 1971.
the Torres Strait. These shared languages, scholars have argued, indicate a global linguistic circuitry and, of relevance to this study, a vehicle for transmission that was as structurally significant as missionary networks.

Indigenous peoples’ movements left criss-crossing tracks across and between the colonial worlds of the southern oceans, physically linking indigenous peoples and interests throughout the Pacific, Aotearoa, and Australia’s northern and southern beaches. This is not evidence of an ideological or conceptual connectivity in and of itself. Rather, and more subtly, it constitutes the historical medium through which spatially isolated political moments of indigenous protest that may have shared a language or sentiment, can be viewed as more than mere coincidence. In 1840 when Billibellary staged, what for Thomas and the Port Phillip administration was a misguided and minor protest, he also engaged in a longer, more spatially diverse campaign. Just as Pomare had done in Tahiti, Billibellary’s singular and cumulative actions injected indigenous perspectives into a growing global movement. His actions engaged a wider emergent discourse on humanitarianism that, having been introduced to indigenous communities by missionaries and others, was being acclimatised to local sites of colonisation. He, like Pomare refused a colonial status of inferiority and insisted upon his and the Wurundjeri’s innate sovereignty and rights. As was the case elsewhere sovereignty, access to land, and rights to mobility were emerging as central and on-going demands.

For the Wurundjeri in 1840, the Narre Narre Warren walk-off was not isolated, but was connected by concentric circuits ridden by trade, missionary and indigenous traffic to other Koori nations, to Indigenous Tasmanians, and to Maori, Pacific Islanders and beyond. In the absence of the kind of archival treasure left by the hard-wired networks of transnational organisations or institutions, such subaltern indigenous circuits need to be understood in Lester’s terms as ‘processes’. In the case of the Pacific and Australian worlds of the early nineteenth century, such processes were constituted by the overlapping colonial worlds of maritime trade, and fleeting moments of physical contact. For these carried the potential for parallel and shared political discourses to entwine.

The Maori Confederacy: Managing imperialism

In early February 1840, a series of talks between a large gathering of Maori and British spectators debated the terms of a potential treaty that would cede Aotearoa to Great Britain. Maori and mostly British settlers and missionaries had engaged with each other as traders of goods, labour and land for much of the nineteenth century. After decades of informal colonisation and intense destabilisation and conflict in Maori communities, by the late 1830s Europe was beginning to view the north island of New Zealand as prime colonial land and territory. The pressure on Maori landowners built in the 1830s, and in 1837 the Wakefield-led New Zealand Company was established with an urgency

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driven by circulating rumours of intensifying French colonial intent. Two years earlier, in 1835, a group of Maori chiefs of the North Island declared themselves an independent confederacy, emulating similar activity that had taken place in Tahiti and Hawai‘i. But by 1840 the British and other European nations rejected their demands for recognition and were yet to properly acknowledge their sovereign claims. At the gathering in February 1840, heated ‘arguments and endeavours’ occurred as the British attempted to induce the same Maori chiefs to sign a treaty ceding sovereignty and pre-emptive rights to purchase land to the British Crown. The ‘meeting broke up’ eventually, with ‘every chief refusing to sign’. The majority continued to refuse cooperation with the totality of annexation that Britain proposed, but after intense lobbying a much smaller group of around 40 chiefs eventually signed what became known as the Treaty of Waitangi.

Shrouded in the humanitarian vocabulary of protection the English version of the Waitangi treaty ceded Maori sovereignty, or kawanatanga (governorship) in Maori. In Article 2 of the English treaty Maori were promised ‘the full exclusive and undisturbed possession of their Lands and Estates Forests Fisheries and other properties’. Finally in Article 3 the English treaty promised to Maori the Queen’s ‘royal protection’ and the provision of ‘all the Rights and Privileges of British Subjects’. The Maori version of the Treaty of Waitangi, however, was translated in a hurry by missionary Henry Williams who was competently literate in the language, and who used Maori equivalents for terms such as land, property, and sovereignty that had far broader meanings. Still the most controversial section of the treaty, Article 2 in Maori promised ‘te tino rangatiratanga’ over ‘wenua’, or as many have since argued, it promised chiefly dominion over resources and land. Throughout the Pacific, and in Maori, whenua tended to mean not just land, but the people of the land, or the people the land sustained. In other words it contradicted Article 1, maintaining dominion and sovereignty over both the land and people, and cast doubt on exactly what sovereign power had been ceded by Maori signatories. Indeed in the days that followed the United States observer Charles Wilkes wrote after an interview with one of the signing chiefs, that he and many others thought ‘they have not alienated any of their rights’ and were ‘not under the impression [they] had given up … authority, or any portion of … land permanently’.

The relationship of land to people, people to chiefly dominion or sovereignty, and therefore sovereignty to land was poorly captured either in English, or by the constitutional and protectionist language of the Treaty of Waitangi. Many have since argued that only the governorship of British subjects within the colony, not the sovereignty of Aotearoa, its lands and its people, was granted...
to the Crown by Maori signatories. While the ambiguity regarding the relative rights of possession enshrined in the treaty would continue to provide a legal foundation for both Maori and Pakeha claims in New Zealand into the twenty-first century, it is significant here for another reason. In the context of its time in 1840, it points to the patterns of campaigns by indigenous peoples in the 1840s to secure or manage their colonial futures in the face of destabilising waves of colonisation.

The activities of Queen Pomare, Billibellary and Maori chiefs epitomise a wider historical trend. Indigenous peoples were dynamic in their adoption of the only imperial languages and traditions that colonial subjects could or would contemplate, and they were creative in the methods they trialled. This is not surprising. By the 1840s and throughout the Pacific region, including Australia and New Zealand, whether imposed or invited, indigenous peoples had made good use of the skills – especially of literacy – that accompanied missionary education and colonial employment. But as the Treaty of Waitangi showed, like Queen Pomare’s letters before it, the vocabulary and concepts available through such education were not a perfect fit. Nevertheless, in indigenous strategies that emerged in the early period of the nineteenth century – such as attempts to articulate land rights; construct kingdoms; establish embryo hybrid legal systems; or petition extra-colonial powers – the appropriation of imperial languages to express indigenous concepts demonstrated a deeply adaptive quality. Political traditions were consolidated that, like petitioning and letter-writing, attempted to reach beyond local colonial circumstances to an external, higher, or universal authority such as the Crown, God, or Law to adjudicate the partisan bias of colonial concerns. That is, they were translocal in their appeal, and tested what we might now recognise as notions of internal and group-specific rights that transcended local authority.

By the end of the 1840s the high-minded humanitarian impulse to ameliorate the destructive impact of colonial contact, trade and settlement seemed to have run its course. For indigenous observers across the Pacific, the British colonial world was therefore entrenched by the 1850s. News of events in the southern reaches of the Pacific Ocean and the rapid, violent and total occupation of the settler colonies in Australia and New Zealand travelled along the trading and missionary lines of contact demonstrating that the colonial world had arrived to stay and was hungry for land and permanent political control. In Australia the Port Phillip experiment was considered a failure. Robinson and the protectorate staff despaired at stemming the destructive and frequently vindictive violence against the Koori population that ravaged the western and south-eastern districts of the colony. As had been the case in New South Wales and Tasmania,

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76 Literature on the treaty and key terms relating to land and sovereignty is vast. See for good overviews Orange 2011: 11–15, 230–267; the contributions to Kawharu 1989; Moon 2002.
77 On frontier violence in Victoria see Clark 1995; Edmonds 2009.
many Indigenous peoples were dispossessed of sweeping swaths of territory in less than a generation depriving them of access to critical sources of physical, economic and cultural sustenance.\(^{78}\)

In New Zealand the initially high-minded emphasis on protecting exclusive and absolute Maori possession of land rapidly gave way to a Crown emphasis on its own right of pre-emption and the need for Maori ‘amalgamation’ into Pakeha society.\(^{79}\) The treaty was widely seen as simply providing security of tenure and a legal foundation for settler purchases of land – both legal and illegal. The resulting full-scale settlement of New Zealand’s North and South islands gave rise to widespread displacement and dispossession of Maori landowners and by 1844 some northern parts of the colony were at war with Maori in sporadic and violent conflict that would escalate into the New Zealand Wars and last until the 1870s. By at least 1847 the New Zealand colony was under pressure from the newly established Colonial Office in London to occupy and acquire what was, in the post-humanitarian paradigm, viewed as ‘waste’ Maori land.\(^{80}\) By the 1850s the provisions of the treaty were largely considered a quaint anachronism by settlers. A decade later two-thirds of the South island and a quarter of the North island had been alienated in patterns of dispossession that continued until 1975.\(^{81}\) The protectionist experiment had clearly evaporated.

A willingness by some Maori to treaty with Britain in 1840 was one amongst diverse attempts by indigenous peoples in Australia and the Pacific to manage the imperial or colonial wave which, as we have seen, was detected long before its full impact hit. Although frequently considered in New Zealand as a starting point for the colonial state, and legally constructed as the Maori ‘Magna Carta’ providing the foundation for the nation, this captures only one side of the history of the treaty.\(^{82}\) From another perspective it was inseparable from a longer Maori campaign to manage British interest in New Zealand as a unified force, and which became visible with the declaration of independence in 1835. The Maori demand that European nations see them as sovereign and independent paralleled what Pomare had done in Tahiti in previous years, and what Billibellary would do in Port Phillip on a smaller scale. It was a grand gesture using an imperial language, but only a single tactic in a longer, translocal campaign of bracing for colonisation, and articulating indigenous rights and entitlements against a demonstrated colonial capacity for brutal disregard of indigenous peoples. While, in the case of the Treaty of Waitangi, the process or device was derivative of missionary tactics throughout the humanitarian period, it had its own characteristics. Maori signatories did not appear to separate land and sovereignty, and the form of protection that signatories agreed upon in the final treaty and years following, was viewed as it had been in Tahiti, as protection

\(^{78}\) Weaver 2003.
\(^{80}\) In 1847, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey, ordered the incoming New Zealand Governor to consider all Maori land not possessed under Lockean notions of property, to be ‘waste’ and available for settlement. See Williams 1999: 108–114; Charters and Erueti 2008: 34–35.
\(^{81}\) Denoon et al 2000: 130.
\(^{82}\) McHugh 1991.
from other colonial interests, not (as the British saw it) as protection from their own ‘native’ ways. Although the treaty was signed, their refusals beforehand, lost now to a history that focuses on the signed treaty, reminds us that it was produced by crossed purposes attempting to achieve arguably radically different outcomes. As such the heated negotiations over the terms of a treaty that Maori viewed as having the potential to protect their interests, paralleled letter-writing and petitioning activities in Tahiti, or the spatial protests of Wurundjeri in Port Phillip.

**Conclusion: Imperial eloquence**

For indigenous peoples the 1840s was an exceptionally vocal and articulate period in the resistance to and accommodation of empire in the Pacific antipodes. As the moments of protest explored here suggest, in many parts of the region indigenous peoples still saw colonists as intruders or guests on their country, and as visitors and equals without the entitlement to rule that settlers saw in themselves. Indigenous peoples also had not yet been thoroughly required by introduced laws, as would be the case in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to see colony and empire as superior rulers and themselves as inferior victims. The humanitarian experiment, at its height of influence in the late 1830s, was planting discursive seeds on which indigenous leaders freely grafted their own translated meanings. Influential imperial discourses of protection, sovereignty, and rights in land emerged in consultation with local missionaries, and enjoyed something of a symbiotic development. These discourses were not set in stone, but were adaptive, receptive and articulated in a common language that indigenous political leaders like Queen Pomare, Billibellary and the Maori elite further refined. The role of missionaries and humanitarian discourses was therefore important. But as the political moments of the 1840s indicate, this importance was less as a source of influence, and more as a vehicle. For indigenous groups utililised missionary and humanitarian circuits, adopting and adapting imperial discourses to articulate the new threat that the colonial era posed, and the foundations on which indigenous people wanted it to proceed.

This article has argued that although more sparse and difficult to access in the nineteenth century, some indigenous peoples in Australia and the Pacific exploited available opportunities to gain a proficient ‘imperial literacy’. In the process they accessed and adapted the underlying circuitry, both physical and discursive, and used it in attempts to transcend local colonial authority. What emerged were shared, translocal and informed political processes that translated and communicated indigenous peoples’ expectations to imperial audiences in a recognisable language. Pomare, Billibellary, and the dissenting Maori chiefs shared a common conceptual apparatus, common ways of articulating and expressing concepts of rights, and they inflected the expression of these with deeply localised and indigenous concerns. But most of all, they shared a knowledge of the colonial storm brewing in the late 1830s and 1840s, a knowledge gleaned from their own physical and epistemological travels.
Over the remaining nineteenth century, these counter-imperial circuits would chase imperial networks as they globally linked colonial outposts, retaining the potential to bloom into modern and truly transoceanic discourses of indigenous rights.

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Encountering Aboriginal knowledge: 
Explorer narratives on north-east 
Queensland, 1770 to 1820

Michael Davis

In early August 1802, botanist Robert Brown had a problem. He had secured a bounty of plants while exploring Port Curtis, today’s Queensland town of Gladstone on the coastal fringe of Australia’s tropical north-east, when he and his party were attacked by some local Aboriginal people. Brown wrote that ‘The attack was made with a war woop & discharge of stones: I was at this moment employ’d in putting specimens of Plants in paper & had scarcely time to collect my scatter’d paper boxes &c & make a hasty retreat.’ Brown was accompanying Matthew Flinders on this survey of the region, having departed northwards from Port Jackson two weeks earlier. The plants had been collected and the task now was to package them securely, ready for the long journey back to the imperial centre. In this way, they became transformed from being parts of living ecosystems into botanical specimens for the enhancement of growing scientific and natural history collections.

Brown’s use of ‘war woop’ possibly references depictions of Native American sounds and gestures acquired from other contexts. He concluded of this encounter ‘Thus ended our first skirmish with these poor unarm’d savages, in which they seemd to have much the advantage of us in point of bravery & also in conduct’. In this primitivist discourse the savage is at once both ‘ignoble’ and ‘noble’. There is a trope of lack, or negation in the reference to the ‘poor unarm’d savages’; yet Brown’s acknowledgement of the Aborigines’ superior ‘conduct’ might imply his recognition of their greater knowledge of the country – a decided advantage in matters of battle.

The attack with stones was not out of context. James Cook had sailed past this place at night in 1770 on the first of his three Pacific voyages, and it is not unlikely that the local Aboriginal people had seen the ships. News about sightings of strangers travelled through large areas of Aboriginal country and was conveyed

1 Brown’s Diary, Thursday 5 August 1802, Vallance, Moore and Groves 2001: 238.
2 On the notion of transforming natural history into ‘specimens’, as ‘artificial things, designed and constructed by naturalists to answer various scientific needs’, see Larsen 1996: 358.
3 Brown’s Diary, Thursday 5 August 1802, Vallance et al 2001: 238.
4 For representations of noble and ignoble savagery see Borsboom 1988. Bernard Smith’s discussion of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ primitivism is particularly apt here; Smith 1960. The literature on constructions of savagery is immense. For some seminal early studies see Smith 1960; Meek 1976.
5 On negation in colonial discourse see Spurr 1993.
from group to group. Aboriginal people defended their lands, and were usually wary of intruders. It is not surprising then if those first moments of encounter, for the Aboriginal people at least, were shaped, among other factors, by fear, perhaps timidity, and possibly anger.

The Aboriginal people seen prior to the visitors’ landing, Brown wrote, ‘were on the beach but on our coming on shore left the beach & retir’d to avoid an interview with us’. The visitors’ strategy to establish mutual understanding seems strangely comical. Brown wrote ‘I proceeded straight into the country without taking any notice of them, judging that the best way of procuring an interview with them was by seeming not to pay attention to them’. This studied avoidance was reciprocated by the local people. But this exchange was no trivial matter, since much was at stake for all participants; for Brown it was at least the securing of botanical specimens, his primary objective on this voyage. For the local people it was perhaps nothing less than land and livelihoods. Brown wrote that the Aborigines ‘did not seem to wish to have any intercourse with us, yet continued at a little distance to watch our motions & on our attempting to ascend a rising ground we were saluted with a shower of stones, neither however well or forcibly thrown’. The stone throwing was a tactic intended as much as a warning as it was an act of violence in itself. Yet we know from readings of cross-cultural encounters elsewhere in Australia and the Pacific that hostility alone cannot always be read into parcels of behaviour; it is one of a vast array of responses. Native and stranger also engaged in tactics involving friendship, reciprocity and exchange in these theatres of encounter. There was often collaboration, and even companionship, alliances and friendship in these encounters. Aboriginal people participated in the European natural history project as guides, collaborators, and companions in many of these voyages.

Apparently little fazed by the hostile action by the local Aboriginal people at Port Curtis, Robert Brown continued his botanising, noting some *Pandanus* and other plants ‘not previously seen’, and adding that ‘the country was very generally burnt by the natives’. Here is the I-witnessing – a common trope in voyaging narrative – of what was to the Europeans, novel flora. Aboriginal peoples’ use of fire to ‘manage’ the landscape, and to secure game by flushing it out was not unknown by European observers; Cook and Banks remarked upon numerous smokes and fires seen during their 1770 voyage through this region. This fire-based land and environment management was just one visible sign of a coherent system of Aboriginal knowledge that was rarely if ever understood as such by these explorers. A coherent Aboriginal knowledge system, woven from all the myriad signs noted by the Europeans of the presence of the local people,

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8 Vanessa Smith has written of friendship in European/Islander colonial encounters in the Pacific in Smith 2010; on the notion of ‘theatricality’ in history see Dening 1996.
9 On Aboriginal peoples’ collaboration with botanists see for example Clarke 2011; on the role of Aboriginal people in European exploration more generally see Kennedy 2013.
10 Brown’s Diary, Thursday 5 August 1802, Vallance et al 2001: 238.
11 See Gammage 2011.
is suggested by observed traces and marks in and on the landscape including paths, remains of camping grounds, foods and food parts, fishing nets, bark-shelters, and the range of material culture, and many other indications.

Brown’s narrative presents many discursive practices. In the Port Curtis encounter the discourse of attack dominates. Yet tensions and anticipated hostilities are also juxtaposed with attempts towards mutual engagement, and there is a constant shifting to and fro between these. But what I am more interested in with these voyaging and exploration narratives is how the engagement between two radically different kinds of knowledge is textually represented. How can we read into the texts of these Aboriginal/European encounters, something about the complex entanglements between indigenous knowledge on the one hand, and what might be glossed as ‘Western knowledge’ on the other? There is a vast and growing body of global writings about indigenous knowledge. A good deal of this is concerned with current and emerging issues and debates in policy, legal protection regimes, and questions of definition, and the role of indigenous knowledge in development, anthropological and ethnobotanical studies. Questions involving protection of indigenous knowledge are often discussed in the context of this knowledge as a kind of ‘intellectual property’, a theme that invites considerable attention in itself. There is also a lively discussion in the literature around the characteristics of, and relationships between indigenous knowledge, science, and varieties of local and peoples’ knowledge. Indigenous knowledge, historically, has been viewed as being of lesser validity than dominant Western knowledge, especially what is ‘defined’ as science. Colonial practices of exploration, ‘discovery’ and settlement have reinforced this view, rendering indigenous knowledge invisible in Europeans’ eyes, or worse, subjugated within dominant knowledge regimes. While the unequal power relations in colonial situations mean that the subaltern voice ultimately cannot ‘speak’, is it possible to glean something of the role of indigenous knowledge in colonial exploration and voyaging encounters?

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12 I am using the concept of discourse here in the Foucaultian sense to mean ‘dispersed and heterogeneous statements, the system that governs their division, the degree to which they depend upon one another, the way in which they interlock or exclude one another, the transformation that they undergo, and the play of their location, arrangement and replacement’, Foucault 1974: 34. In this understanding discourse is not only language, speech and utterances, but the entire system in which these operate, are produced, and circulate, and includes all textual productions.

13 On legal/environmental aspects of indigenous knowledge, including in regard to intellectual property and biodiversity law see for example Anderson 2009; Curci 2010; Davis 1999, 2006, 2008; Gibson 2005; McManus 2002; Mgbeoji 2006; von Lewinski and Hahn 2004.

14 This is also a very large and growing body of literature. A few examples are Agrawal 1995; Anderson 2002; Brush and Stabinsky 1996; Dei, Hall and Rosenberg 2000; Ellen 2004; Green 2008; Sillitoe 2007; Turnbull 1997; Chambers and Gillespie 2000; Ellen, Parkes and Bicker 2000.

15 There is a very large literature on ‘indigenous knowledge’ and ‘science’. See for example Agrawal 1995; Anderson 2002.

There is a large body of scholarship examining the working together of different knowledge traditions – European and non-Western. But what seems largely absent in much of this is an inquiry into the complex ways that Aboriginal and Western knowledge systems have intersected with, and shaped one another over time, within a particular locality. This article aims to address a gap in the literature on indigenous/European encounters in two ways. First, to understand how, and in what ways indigenous ecological knowledge and practices have informed, and contributed historically to the formation of scientific and other types of colonial knowledge. Second, and more specifically, to interrogate voyaging accounts for north-east Australia to consider how these might show that Europeans over time developed a growing awareness of the roles of Aboriginal environment-related knowledge.

To consider these themes, I select some events from explorer narratives by Brown and Flinders in 1802, and from a voyage in 1819 by Phillip Parker King, who was accompanied by botanist Allan Cunningham. In exploring entanglements between indigenous knowledge and various forms of colonising knowledge, including botany and geography, I envisage all these forms of knowledge not as homogenous entities, but as partial, highly localised, dispersed and situated. In focusing on these voyaging narratives, I am reading them not as unproblematic records of some absolute reality, but rather, as the products of a complex ‘interplay of producers, subjects, contexts, discourses and audience’. Reading these texts ‘against the grain’ allows for tracing what Bronwen Douglas has termed indigenous ‘counter-signs’, the ‘oblique stamp of indigenous actions, desires and agency on recorded imperial imaginings’.

Examining the narratives by botanists and naturalists on voyaging expeditions allows for an interrogation as to how, or indeed if, the activity of natural history observation, recording and collecting engaged with local Aboriginal peoples’ environment-related knowledge and practices. On the face of it these activities – European botany and Aboriginal environmental knowledge – might appear to share some common ground. Here is Robert Brown intent on identifying plants in this new country, and making a fine collection to take back to Britain. Fascinated by this abundance of exotic nature, he names these species, employing the classification system developed by Carl Linnaeus in 1735. The Aboriginal people also have an interest in the natural world, though their relationships with nature are very different. They certainly classify the world around them – though in different ways, for different purposes. They emphasise plants and animals as part of a complete, living system, and the relationships between and among

18 The literature on imperial science, and on science and ‘other’ knowledge traditions is very large. On the geography and ‘spatial turn’ in science see for example Powell 2007, for analyses of relationships between different types of knowledge including indigenous and scientific see Chambers and Gillespie 2000; Turnbull 1997; Agrawal 1995.
19 Douglas 1999: 68.
species are as important as the individual plants or animals.\footnote{This has often been referred to as indigenous ecological knowledge. However, the use of ‘ecology’ here needs to be interrogated more closely, to distinguish it from ecology as a particular Western discipline. See Ellen 2006 for one useful contribution to an anthropology of different approaches to classifying.} In their cosmology, species are valued not only for their use, but also for their associations, for their symbolism, and for the part they play in the entire system. Informing these approaches to the nineteenth-century natural world by Europeans and Aborigines were two different knowledge systems. For many Europeans, nature was an object, a useful commodity, and a scientific specimen.\footnote{This is not, however, to cast European science as a monolithic and static entity, or mode of understanding; rather, as with Western discourses more generally, they are seen as changing, dispersed and fragmented.} Aboriginal people tend to see nature within a universe that connects humans, animals and plants with the ancestral domain. Although in broad terms these two systems – Western science and indigenous knowledge – may be constituted differently, there is not a binary opposition between them. In the entanglements between these different knowledge systems, there are points of commonality, as well as radical incommensurability.\footnote{See for example Davis 2006 for a discussion. David Turnbull has discussed the idea of multiple knowledge traditions extensively; see for example Turnbull 1997, 2002, 2005.}

Local sites of encounter such as at Port Curtis are situated in global contexts. In the botanising work by Brown and his colleagues plants are transposed from their local ecosystems into specimens for imperial scientific botanical collections. This kind of transposition was symptomatic of the region in a wider sense, as a site for the juxtaposition of different colonising narratives and imaginaries. In a Eurocentric macro-narrative, this region of north-east Australia is a significant geo-political one for the developing colonial-settler project. In these wider narratives competing imperial power imperatives combine with multiple colonising projects of science, survey and appropriation. At the same time, these imperial projects inscribed and appropriated multiple local indigenous narratives through naming and classifying practices. Place-naming figures prominently in this colonising schema, and is a feature of these scientific voyaging narratives. For example, Port Curtis is named for Vice-Admiral Sir Roger Curtis, who had helped Flinders earlier while at the Cape of Good Hope.\footnote{Flinders 1814 [1966] vol II: 19.} Naming places inscribes them in European colonial registers, and simultaneously erases or subjugates pre-existing indigenous referents.\footnote{Naming as a colonial discourse is extensively discussed by Paul Carter in his seminal work, Carter 1988. See also Spurr 1993.}

In these early years of the beginning of the nineteenth century, this region of north-east Australia began to be inscribed in the European imaginary through the detailed cartographic surveys and explorations of James Cook. Other European voyagers had earlier made brief landfalls or distant sightings of parts of this extensive eastern coast. The landmass that is today’s Australia was known initially to Matthew Flinders as Terra Australis, and earlier Dutch
navigators and cartographers inscribed it as New Holland. Cook had already, on 22 August 1770, taken possession for King George III at a point on the Cape York Peninsula, naming this part of the north-east coast New South Wales. By the time Flinders was circumnavigating, the fledgling settlement at Port Jackson had been established and the imperial project was in full train, with much activity being given to the search for productive lands and resources, and for good rivers, harbours and ports. At the same time, in its pursuit of knowledge, the empire was busy collecting, cataloguing, classifying and recording, encoding the new and exotic into the familiar. Exotic fauna and flora were keenly sought for their value to science and for societal progress. In all this colonial knowledge-making, Indigenous knowledge, mostly hidden, or rarely referenced in the explorers’ narratives, played a vital part. In this grand scheme, the voyage of Flinders was part of a pattern of scientific botanical journeys of discovery, with Dampier’s survey on the north-western Australian coast in 1688, the Cook and Banks expedition of 1770, and, some 50 years later, voyages such as that of Phillip Parker King, with botanist Allan Cunningham on this eastern coast in 1819.

On Flinders’ voyage, Scottish born Robert Brown, one of the protégés of prominent and wealthy Enlightenment figure Joseph Banks, contributed to the project of collecting the natural world for British and global interests. His enthusiasm for botany had begun early, and he continued this keen interest while in Ireland in the Fifeshire Fencibles during the late 1790s. Following his botanical work in Australia, he returned to Britain where he spent years describing and publishing the collections he had made. In 1810 he became librarian to Joseph Banks until the latter’s death in 1820, and he inherited Banks’ library and herbarium. In 1837 he became Keeper of the Botanical Department of the Natural History Museum in London, and was President of the Linnaean Society from 1849 to 1853. Brown’s dedication to his botanical work undoubtedly contributed to the privileging in his journal of the pursuit of plants over discoursing on the hostile encounter with Aboriginal people. In the midst of the danger of violence at Port Curtis his chief concern was for continuity of access to the plants, and the safety of their packaging and transfer to the ship. But as we read further into Brown’s narrative there is an emerging sense, albeit likely not an intentional one, of a richly textured landscape of Aboriginal environmental practices. Although on the face of it, the encounter is narrated in terms of avoidance, tension, and an aggressive act, the

26 The notion of ‘Terra Australis’, an unknown land of the south, stems from Aristotle and Ptolemy, and was transmitted through the cartographic representations and voyaging literature to Alexander Dalrymple, and thence to Matthew Flinders. He wrote: ‘There is no probability, that any other detached body of land, of nearly equal extent, will ever be found in a more southern latitude; the name Terra Australis will, therefore, remain descriptive of the geographical importance of this country, and of its situation on the globe: it has antiquity to recommend it; and, having no reference to either of the two claiming nations, appears to be less objectionable than any other which could have been selected’. It is interesting to note that Flinders thought the term ‘Australia’ might be more appropriate; Flinders 1814 [1966] vol I: iii. The term ‘New Holland’ (Nova Hollandia) was coined by Abel Tasman, and was in force until Flinders changed it to Terra Australis and then Australia.

27 For Cook’s journal at this point see Beaglehole 1955: 387–388.

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detailed botanical discourse that runs through suggests a reading that this place, as elsewhere, is deeply imbued with an Aboriginal presence in, and engagement with the environment.

In the Port Curtis area the Bayali and other language groups have maintained their ancient knowledge of plants and other natural resources over thousands of years. This knowledge, which fashions their sense of place, is expressed in multiple ways, including through language and gesture, environmental management and food gathering activities, and in a variety of material forms. Their relationship to land and country, configured through the sacred geography of the ancestors, is constantly enacted and re-enacted through ceremony, song and dance, and in the everyday domain. Livelihood activities of food gathering, hunting, the preparation of food, dwellings, and all the work of material culture are vital elements in this place-making. Flinders offers his narrative of the Port Curtis encounter:

The naturalist and his companions landed at the west side of the entrance, where some Indians had assembled to look at the ship; but they retired on the approach of our gentlemen, and afterwards taking advantage of a hillock, began to throw stones at the party; nor would they desist until two or three muskets were fired over their heads, when they disappeared. There were seven bark canoes lying on the shore, and near them hung upon a tree some parts of a turtle; and scoop nets, such as those of Hervey’s Bay, were also seen.\[29\]

Here, the stone-throwing incident seems quickly passed over, as Flinders’ narrative shifts to observations on the visible signs of Aborigines’ living patterns, food procurement and material culture. He noted that ‘the country around Port Curtis is overspread with grass and produces *eucalyptus* and other trees common to this coast; yet the soil is either sandy or covered with loose stones, and generally incapable of cultivation’.\[30\] His story largely replicates that of Brown, except for his use of the term ‘Indians’, reflecting a discourse of primitivism transposed from the Americas (akin to Brown’s use of ‘war woop’), and his account of the number of canoes seen. But again, there are multiple layers of discursive practice operating here. Jostling with a primitivist discourse, there is also a comparative ethnology (‘scoop nets like those at Hervey Bay’), and the often-present discourse of conflict, interspersed with attempts at communication. There is also a consistent discourse on productivity of land and resources – another prominent feature of these voyaging narratives, consistent with the prevailing Enlightenment ideas about ‘improvement’. The text is at once, manners and customs reportage, as well as cartographic and geographic survey.

As well as these multiple, intersecting discourses within a single text, there seems to be a disconnection between the discourses about interactions between the

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30 Flinders 1814 [1966] vol II: 19, italics in original.
Aborigines and the intruders, and those having to do with botanical and other ecologically based matters. The botanists continue naming and collecting plants, in the midst of all the activity that the encounter entails. Scenarios of conflict are juxtaposed with details of plants and animals identified and collected, and comments on Aboriginal fishing, plant use, burning and other environment based practices, as well as comments on the Aborigines themselves. Although apparently fluently presented in the flow of the narrative, these discourses, all present within a single text, are also at odds with one another in their content and style.

Another perspective on the Port Curtis encounter comes from the pen of ship’s gardener Peter Good, who accompanied Brown in the botanical work. On 5 August, Good recorded ‘several large Canoes on the Beach & some Natives to the North of entrance’. Here, he wrote, ‘Mr Brown & Party went ashore’. At this point:

a number of Natives appeared making Gestures as we approached the Shore but on coming near they all run into the woods – We walked on in search of Natural History without paying any attention to them & crossed a neck of land till we found ourselves on an Arm of this large Bay – many Natives before us but would not permit us to come near them always retreating as we advanced on advancing to a little hill covered with Trees they threw a number of Stones towards us & kept among the Bushes out of sight – on our advancing up the hill they disappeared – we continued to advance till we came to the opposite side of the hill & in going down the bank the Natives gave the War Song & rushed out among the Bushes in different directions, throwing stones & sticks at us – they appeared to have no Spears we got into an open space at the bottom of the hill and fired some Muskets in the Air when they all run [sic] away as fast as they could run – on returning to the Shore we found the Shell of a very large Turtle which they had been roasting very lately, the head & part of the flesh was still firm – a great part of the flesh of Turtle hung up in a Tree of the Pandanus odoratissima so that it appears they live in luxury – they had many fishing nets & cordage about the Beach executed in the same manner as at Sandy Cape – Their Canoes were similar to those at Port Jackson but much larger & better executed…

Here, as in Brown’s text, the naming of this particular type of *Pandanus* palm tree in the Linnaean system implies that these species were already known from elsewhere. This is another feature of these narratives, indicating their position in a wider discourse of botanical voyaging expeditions. The taxonomic classificatory discourses of Flinders’, Brown’s, and Good’s narratives inscribe a dominant European knowledge onto pre-existing Aboriginal systems.

Peter Good’s story again weaves together multiple discourses. He has different ways with language in his description of the scene. Here, the Aborigines ‘making

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gestures’ might be construed as giving warning. Brown had not referred to this gestural event, but it conveys a wider range of meanings than does the hostile act of throwing stones. Good’s phrase ‘in search of Natural History’ similarly opens up more possibilities for conjecture about the botanical collecting project. Searching for natural history might embrace more than just cataloguing, classifying and collecting. Flinders’ scientific enterprise was as much visually oriented, as it was object focused. The ship’s contingent included British landscape painter William Westall and Austrian botanical illustrator Ferdinand Bauer. The Europeans’ engagement with nature was as much a project of seeing, as it was of documenting and collecting, as the artists contributed to the visual representation of place and peoples. As well as the eye of the explorer, the play of sounds is also evident in the representation of the Aborigines’ utterance accompanying their stone-throwing. In Good’s account, Robert Brown’s ‘war woop’ becomes a ‘War Song’, perhaps somewhat less culturally laden, and suggestively inviting inquiry into the representation of sound in these colonial encounters. The gardener’s comment that ‘it appears they live in luxury’ speaks to a discourse on the relative patterns of Aboriginal resource procurement, and the ecologies and economics of livelihoods. Good’s narrative also shows the discourse of comparative ethnology, and markers of cultural difference as he references an absence of spears, observations of fishing nets and cordage, similar to what had been seen at Sandy Cape, and canoes that differed from those noted at Port Jackson. As in all these texts, Good’s narrative interweaves descriptive accounts of Aboriginal environmental and food gathering and preparation activities together with the dramas of the conflict. In all this jostling of discourses there are also hints of a coherent ecological system at work in all the signs of Aboriginal living (his ‘live in luxury’ comment).

Botanising and engagement with Aborigines at Sandy Cape, Hervey Bay: Brown and Flinders, late July 1802

Not all encounters involved conflict or violence. Only a few days earlier further south, relations with the Aboriginal people had seemed less fractious, despite a tense initial meeting. Here, at the end of July, Flinders and party had reached Sandy Cape near Hervey Bay. They anticipated some good botanising as Flinders wrote in his journal ‘in order to give the botanists an opportunity of examining the productions of Sandy Cape, I determined to remain here a day’. Some Aboriginal people were observed on the beach, and a boat was dispatched ‘to commence an acquaintance with them’. Flinders noted that they ‘retired, and suffered Mr. Brown to botanise without disturbance’. Although no conflict ensued in this encounter, there is here, as at Port Curtis, a disconnection between the discourses on relations with Aborigines, and those on the botanising project. From this extract it might be supposed that the presence of the local people was seen as a hindrance to the botanising. There is once again the avoidance – though

33 Entry for Friday 30 July 1802 in Flinders 1814 [1966]: 10.
on this occasion we are not told of any subsequent aggression. The disjuncture in the text between the pursuit of the botanical project and the apparent reticence, fear or disinterest of the Aboriginal people precludes the possibility for mutual engagement or exchange in ecologically based matters. The botanists’ objectives were to identify, document and collect plants, and to ensure their safe packaging ready for the imperial museums and scientific study. At the same time, the local groups – here the Butchulla clans of Fraser Island, Gubbi Gubbi and others – were engaged in their own, ancient systems of maintaining, transmitting and performing their ecological knowledge based practices.

We cannot know if in their attempts to make the ‘acquaintance’ of the local Aborigines, Flinders’ party had in mind to specifically inquire into, or draw upon these peoples’ knowledge of the country and its ecology. If this entry from Brown’s narrative is taken as an example for the depiction of these kinds of encounters, we would not have much to say about a history of how Aboriginal knowledge and Western science engage. By ‘engage’, here I mean meetings in which there is some degree of shared understanding and meaningful communication. Instead, it appears from this that the Europeans, in Greg Dening’s words, ‘played out their own cultural systems in caricatured charades’. From this brief scenario we would be wondering whether the Investigator’s botanists had any interest in listening to the Aborigines’ talk about plants, in being attentive, in David Abrams’ sense, to ‘the sounds of an oral language – to the rhythms, tones, and inflections’, let alone actively seeking the Aborigines’ knowledge to assist in the identification and procurement of the local flora. Instead, our history-making might conclude that the presence of local people was regarded, at best as irrelevant, and at worst, as disruptive of the Europeans’ precious botanical work. Yet we know from the wider record of these voyaging explorer narratives that Europeans and Aborigines often acted together in the botanical work – although the respective meanings each attached to this project may have differed. As historian Philip Clarke says ‘British colonists who came in 1788 to establish themselves in the “new” country found the indigenous land “owners” to be both a physical threat and an important source of information about the environment’. These ambivalences may be equally true for the explorers and surveyors during later years. Many explorers were accompanied by Aboriginal people who acted as guides and interpreters, and who might also have assisted in the botanical work, including in collecting plants. But it is not clear in the narratives by Flinders and Brown, as it is in some later botanists’ and voyagers’ accounts such as those of King, Cunningham and subsequent expeditions, that

34 Dening 1980: 19.
35 Abram 1996: 140. See also Troy 1996 and Carter 1996 for discussions relating to European and Aboriginal encounters and the role of sound, dialogue and language.
36 We do know from historical records of encounters in other parts of Australia, that Europeans and Aboriginal people worked together in a common enterprise of botanical collecting and identification of species, with Aboriginal people as guides and collectors; see Clarke 2008: 6.
the botanists worked closely with local Aboriginal people at a particular place, in ways that enabled the Europeans to acquire a greater understanding of the role of Aboriginal environment-related knowledge.

In considering further the narrative of this encounter at Sandy Cape, the scene becomes more complex. The men had separated to pursue their various activities, with the ‘naturalist’s party’ walking along the shore towards the upper part of the bay, while Flinders and six others, including the Aboriginal man Flinders referred to as his ‘native friend Bongaree’, proceeded to the extremity of the Cape. Here, there were ‘several Indians with branches of trees in their hands’. Flinders describes the ensuing actions:

Whilst they retreated themselves, [they] were waving for us to go back. Bongaree stripped off his clothes and laid aside his spear, as inducements for them to wait for him; but finding they did not understand his language, the poor fellow, in the simplicity of his heart, addressed them in broken English, hoping to succeed better.

Here language and material exchanges play key roles in this scene, but the meetings are enacted in a theatre of ambiguity, misread signs, and unequal power relations. Flinders reports that ‘at length they suffered him to come up, and by degrees our whole party joined; and after receiving some presents, twenty of them returned with us to the boats, and were feasted upon the blubber of two porpoises, which had been brought on shore purposely for them’. These exchanges concluded when ‘the naturalists returned, bringing some of the scoop nets used by the natives in catching fish; and we then quitted our new friends, after presenting them with hatchets and other testimonials of our satisfaction’.

The intertwined discourses on Aboriginal presence, and on observations on the country around Sandy Cape and its resources can be seen again, in the following entry from botanist Robert Brown’s diary:

We saw no natives but in many places found the shrubs &c on fire, & in one part of the beach a range of fences from the wind & one hut formed, as in the neighbourhood of Port Jackson, of a piece of Bark bent in the middle.

... Not far from the beach we found about a dozen fishing nets of the Natives, part of which we carried off leaving a hatchet & red night cap in their stead, but seeing some of the natives approaching towards us

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38 Flinders 1814 [1966] vol II: 10, italics in original.
we took up the hatchet &c. On their join[ing] us, which they did only three in number & without arms, they demanded their nets, which we returned to them but again bargained for some of them, giving them 2 hatchets and 2 red night caps in return which they seemd to take as an equivalent.

On our join[ing] the Capns party we found many of the natives along with them & learned that they had had intercourse with them soon after we left them. This intercourse was brought about by Bongare [Bongaree] the Port Jackson native who, unarmd, boldly went up to a considerable party of them armd with spears –

This was a scene of multiple exchanges, in a setting of confused or misconstrued notions about the relationships between material objects, gift and exchange, and the roles of these for communication and shared understanding. Bongaree, as Flinders’ friend and guide, here asserted an important role in assisting the Europeans to establish communication with the local Aboriginal people, but it ultimately once again proved unsuccessful, as Flinders notes, ‘our native did not seem to understand a word of their language, nor did they seem to know the use of his womerah or throwing stick’. Here, Flinders’ articulates a discourse on comparative ethnology in his observations of different Aboriginal traditions and material culture in different locations:

one of them being invited to imitate Bongaree, who lanced a spear with it very dexterously and to a great distance, he, in the most awkward manner, threw both womerah and spear together. Nothing like a canoe was seen amongst these people; but they must have some means of passing over the water to short distances, since I found, in 1799, that Curlew Islet, near the head of this bay, had been visited.

Bongaree’s presence during Flinders’ expedition was crucial. Bronwen Douglas has pointed to Bongaree/Bungaree’s role as a mediator and intermediary, arguing that ‘the content and wording of [Flinders’] own journal suggest that the most potent element in local responses to the strangers [the Europeans] and repeated expression of eagerness to communicate with them was Bungaree’. 

The apparent absence of canoes and of knowledge of the womerah in this text can be read as markers of lack in a hierarchy of primitivism. There is the assumption of savagery as the intruders ‘took up the hatchet’ the moment they saw the Aboriginal people approach. Jostling with this discourse of cultural difference and of savage otherness, is one on the relative productivity of nature, and a general assessment of the suitability of this place for a harbour. The absence of elements of material culture here suggests the kind of ‘hard primitivism’ sometimes attributed to the Australian Aborigines, wherein the people were ‘modern exemplars of the austere virtuous lives led in classical

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41 Brown’s Diary, Saturday 31 July 1802, Vallance et al 2001: 231.
time by such peoples as the Spartans and the Scythians’. But this absence can also be interpreted as a marker of ‘soft primitivism’, the noble savage, man in a state of nature, an Enlightenment image that was re-affirmed by Europeans’ encounters with Polynesians in the eighteenth century. Representations of these local people here then are caught between the noble and the ignoble savage. The observations of Aborigines by Cook and Banks, which led them to generally typify Aborigines as noble savages, were by now, some three decades later, tempered by Europeans’ greater experience with indigenous peoples, and changing European attitudes. The settlement at Port Jackson, and subsequent encounters had destabilised the Rousseauian romanticism of the noble savage. Although it was not quite the case that the ‘pendulum had swung firmly to the side of civilization’, there was an increasing tension between the savage as noble and ignoble. The ignoble savage was now in greater tension with ideas of noble savagery, and the interplay between these representations was common in Enlightenment and later travel narratives. The stadial construct of primitivism that saw hunter-gatherers low in a hierarchy that was based on relative subsistence modes, did not convincingly hold up when Europeans came to see the livelihoods of Aboriginal people more closely. Here the native was neither noble nor ignoble, but rather something more complex: a kind of ‘proto-economic’ man. Here was the primitive economy in all its richly evident detail, as the explorers noted abundant evidence of a distinctly Aboriginal mode of production that appeared finely tuned to the availability of food resources and environmental conditions.

In Robert Brown’s journal for Sandy Cape there is the dominant discourse, as to be expected, of botany. But he too displays a comparative ethnological discourse, with tropes of primitivism, with comments on difference and similarity in noting various aspects of Aboriginal people’s physical characteristics, including skin colour, physical markings and bodily adornment (‘in their features, colour &c, they are precisely similar to those of P[ort] Jackson’, ‘In size they appeard somewhat inferior’). But Brown’s botanical discourse is of particular interest in my inquiry into the shaping of discourses of indigenous knowledge and Western science. He writes:

> It is rather surprising however that at none of their fires, of which we saw many, did we meet with any fish bones or fragments of shell fish, But at all of them the flowering amenta of Banksia verticillata & the scarce ripe fruit of Pandanus odoratus /?/ in considerable quantity. As we found many nearly ripe Legumens of the species of Dolichos, which is so common on the shores unattached to the growing plants, I suppose

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44 Smith 1960: 22.
46 Coleman 2005: 424. See also Strong 1986.
either from prejudice or experience of its hurtful effects they forbear eating this bean, which as far as I could judge from its taste I should suppose a safe & nutritious food. 49

This text maintains the theme of inscribing a Linnaean taxonomy onto Aboriginal peoples’ lands and environments, but it also does something more. Brown’s puzzlement about likely Aboriginal eating preferences hints at an awareness of an underlying sense of the local peoples’ toxicological knowledge concerning food plants. Combined with his keenly observed remarks on what was seen, and what seemed curiously absent from the vicinity of Aboriginal campfires, this extract from Brown’s journal allows for a more layered reading of intersecting discourses on European and Aboriginal philosophies of nature and ecological knowledge. Here again is the exemplar Homo economicus, underpinned by a system of living in the natural world that was welded together by an unseen knowledge.

These occasional glimpses of a system of food and ecologically based knowledge can also sometimes be seen in Flinders’ journal. Arriving at Keppel Bay, further north of Hervey Bay on 9 August, the explorer’s eye for the lie of the land is well presented as he writes ‘my object in stopping at this bay was to explore two openings marked in it by captain Cook, which it was possible might be the entrances of rivers leading into the interior’. 50 Flinders’ text displays the play of different discourses as he deftly shifts from remarks on physical appearance, to comments on visual indications of the Aborigines’ eating and living arrangements:

It is scarcely necessary to say, that these people are almost black, and go entirely naked, since none of any other colour, or regularly wearing clothes, have been seen in any part of Terra Australis. About their fire places were usually scattered the shells of large crabs, the bones of turtle, and the remains of a parsnip-like root, apparently of fern; and once the bones of a porpoise were found; besides these, they doubtless procure fish, and wild ducks were seen in their possession. 51

Here is the now familiar repertoire of competing imagery, with depictions of skin colour and nakedness, typical tropes of primitivism. 52 Yet these representations of native otherness are interleaved with a discourse of biology and the abundance of nature, as Flinders notes the presence of kangaroos, bustards, and a variety of other species including curlews, gulls, ‘and some lesser birds’, as well as oysters. And again, there is an oddly discordant relationship between these discourses. The abundance of species, combined with Flinders’ observations on the food

49 Brown’s Diary, Saturday 31 July 1802, Vallance et al 2001: 231.
52 See Konishi 2012 for an excellent discussion of representation of skin and bodies of Aboriginal males in eighteenth century explorers’ texts.
resources scattered around the camp fire site might be read as suggesting an underlying Aboriginal domain in which food preferences, modes of procurement and other ecologically based livelihood features are prominent.

The diversity of discourses of botany, race and difference, and of productivity of nature, jostling within the performances of tense colonial encounters, is again apparent in the narrative of Allan Cunningham, botanist on the survey voyage by Phillip Parker King nearly two decades after Flinders and Brown were exploring and collecting in this part of coastal Queensland.

**The pursuit of flora ruptured by the natives: Allan Cunningham at Endeavour River, 1819**

In November 1819, reflecting on the events in June of that year at the Endeavour River, near present day Cooktown, Cunningham complained to his mentor Joseph Banks:

> Here was a period of 14 Days, that might have been wholly at my Disposal, had it not been for the annoyances experienced from the ‘Prowling’ natives, who made a rather determin’d but unsuccessful attack upon the Boat builders and others on shore, while I was at some Distance in pursuit of Flora, which fully occupied my time ... it was a subject of much Regret to me, that in consequence of the Rupture with the Natives, my Walks during the last Week of our stay at Endeavour River, were either very much circumscribed, or wholly prevented.\(^{53}\)

It seems that Cunningham did not consider that his botanical work might have been enhanced or enriched by the local knowledge held by the area’s inhabitants. He continued:

> I had determined (in an absence of two days, at least, from the vessel) upon an excursion to the more distant and loftier hills, where woods densely matted to their summits would doubtless have afforded considerable scope for research. This however was wholly frustrated by the decidedly hostile dispositions of these Australians. ... I trust, however, that the specimens gathered at Endeavour River will prove an acceptable renovation of the plants preserved at Soho Square and originally discovered by yourself and Dr. Solander in July and August, 1770.\(^{54}\)

Cunningham’s complaint that the local Aboriginal people were jeopardising his collecting activities echoes the narratives of Flinders and Brown, in which we saw the botanical work being hampered, or at least studiously ignored by the Aborigines. This seems to be a persistent theme. Avoidance behaviour by

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\(^{53}\) Allan Cunningham to Joseph Banks, 8 November 1819, cited in Clarke 2008: 77; see also Lee 1925: 429–434.

\(^{54}\) Lee 1925: 430.
the Aborigines, motivated by many factors, not least of which was likely fear, appears frequently in many of these encounter narratives. But this was by no means their only response to the visitors. Although this article is concerned with voyaging texts on north-east Australia, the historical record shows many examples of Aboriginal people and botanists working together during exploration expeditions in various parts of Australia.\(^{55}\)

Surrey born Cunningham was, like Robert Brown, a ‘Banksian collector’.\(^{56}\) By the time of his visit to this part of Australia he had participated in John Oxley’s 1817 inland journey through the Blue Mountains to seek the sources of the Lachlan and Macquarie Rivers, and was now an experienced explorer and botanical collector. He had some interest in, and knowledge of Aboriginal people. He had visited Tasmania earlier in 1819, where he had ‘spent some time trying to compile a vocabulary of their language’.\(^{57}\) Compiling lists of Aboriginal words was a common enough activity from the earliest explorations, including during the voyage of Cook and Banks in 1770. Words and language are of course significant vehicles for, or indicators of indigenous knowledge. Although at Endeavour River, hostile relations were jeopardising Cunningham’s botanising, there was communication, and the botanist was attentive to the local language. He wrote:

> It appears rather singular that of a dozen natives, with whom we communicated a day or two previous to the commencement of open hostilities, and who were very communicative, they had no idea of the word kangaroo, although they knew the animal we spoke of, as well by our signs as by its frequency on the rocky hills around us. The animal bearing the generally established name of kangaroo throughout Europe they called Mauya (or Menuah).\(^{58}\)

This linguistic confusion was in part brought about by the term *kangaroo* having been taken by Europeans from Cook and Banks’ visit to the Endeavour River in 1770, circulated through England, and brought back with King, who had assumed a universality of the word among all Aboriginal people.\(^{59}\)

Like Cunningham, some Europeans were curious about the Aboriginal peoples’ words for things seen, for animals and plants. Yet at the same time, and oddly lacking congruency with this, their interest in Aboriginal peoples’ knowledge of the natural world, their language, and their material culture was predominantly

\(^{55}\) Cunningham worked closely with individual Aboriginal people during several of his botanical expeditions elsewhere in Australia. While at King George Sound for example in 1821 he was accompanied and assisted in his botanising by a local Aboriginal man referred to as ‘Jack’; see Clarke 2008: 74 citing King 1827. Another of the many examples is the collaborative friendship formed between another Banks sponsored collector, George Caley, and a young Eora man named Moowat’tin during Caley’s expeditions in the early 1800s. On this, see Turnbull 2000.

\(^{56}\) See Mackay 1996 for Joseph Banks and his circle of botanical collectors.

\(^{57}\) McMinn 1970: 41.

\(^{58}\) Allan Cunningham in Lee 1925: 430–431.

\(^{59}\) For the Guugu Yimidir language and the naming of the Kangaroo by Banks and Cook, see Haviland 1974; also see Cilento 1971; Sharman 1974.
museological in its orientation. Words, language, and cultural objects of Aboriginal people were regarded in similar ways to the plants and animals being identified and collected: that is, as things to be classified and ordered according to predetermined registers and ideas, separate from their living contexts.

**Encounters and the role of Aboriginal knowledge**

Tensions, misunderstandings, and conflict are frequent in these encounters, and the explorer narratives give much play to these. Yet amidst the conflict we also find exchanges, trade, and communication of sorts, no matter that it is typically strangely placed, often misconstrued, and bears different meanings and intentions to the different actors. There are parallel discourses too, that have more to do with the steady and detailed work of botanical and geographical-survey exploration, with the Europeans also keenly noting ethnological details and Aboriginal food gathering, preparation and environment-related activities. In this sense, if any generalisation can be offered about the kinds of textual representations about Indigenous knowledge in these narratives, it is of a distinct Aboriginal cultural and economic livelihood system – one that is neither typically one of noble nor ignoble savagery.

In this article I have begun to interrogate the relationships between two different types of knowledge in early colonial encounters in this part of Australia, as represented in explorer texts. These encounters can, I suggest, be understood by focusing on the specifics of places, or sites in which they occur, and on the reported particularities – the language, actions, gestures, movements – of meetings between voyagers and Aborigines. It is at these sites of encounter, and in their textual forms, that different kinds of knowledge jostle and ‘interrogate’ one another to form a complex discourse. Close scrutiny of these explorer texts conveys a sense that there is another knowledge system at work, barely visible, yet critical in forming a particular type of colonial knowledge – one shaped from the entanglements between European and Aboriginal knowledge. The sites of encounter between Aboriginal people and Europeans, with their multiple discourses and representative practices might be read for the ways in which plural, intersecting knowledge systems and ideas about ecology engaged. This engagement results in the production of new forms of colonial knowledge, and is also critical in the shaping of imperial natural history science.

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60 Historian David Turnbull has argued that ‘the future for local knowledge traditions is ... dependent on the creation of a third space, an interstitial space in which the local knowledge traditions can be reframed, decentred and the social organisation of trust can be negotiated’, Turnbull 1997: 560.
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Smith, Keith Vincent 1992, King Bungaree: A Sydney Aborigine meets the Great South Pacific Explorers, 1799-1830, Kangaroo Press, Kenthurst, NSW.


Troy, Jakelin 1996, “‘By slow degrees we began to understand each other … even in this the natives have the advantage’”, in Exchanges: Cross-Cultural Encounters in Australia and the Pacific, Ross Gibson (ed), Museum of Sydney and Historic Houses Trust of NSW, Sydney: 22–57.


In 1936 a flurry of newspaper reports alleged widespread prostitution of Aboriginal women and girls to Japanese pearlers. The claims had a dramatic impact. Within weeks of them being printed a report was placed before the Department of the Interior. A vessel was commissioned to patrol the Arnhem Land coast. The allegations were raised at the first meeting of State Aboriginal protection authorities. Cabinet closed Australian waters to foreign pearling craft and a control base was established in the Tiwi Islands. Japanese luggers were fired upon with machine guns and a crew detained in Darwin. These escalating events occurred within five years of a series of attacks on Japanese by Aborigines (culminating in the infamous Caledon Bay spearing of five trepangers, along with the killings of two white men and one policeman on Woodah Island), and only five years before Australian and Japanese forces waged war. Much ink was spilt over the course of this print scandal, and while reports made use of established language such as ‘vice’ and ‘outrage’, a telling omission was the commonly known phrase ‘Black Velvet’. The lapse could be considered a deliberate attempt to mask the expression’s explicit reference to the tactile sensations associated with illicit white contact with racialised genitals. However tracing its use reveals that the phrase exclusively pertained to white men’s sexualisation of Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women were not ‘Black Velvet’ to Japanese men, indicating this colloquial language played a role in establishing settlers’ sense of proprietorial ownership of Aboriginal women’s bodies – quite literally, for whom Aboriginal women were out-of-bounds.

The pearling scandal played out principally in print and this article focuses on that media coverage to provide both context and contrast to the use of the term ‘Black Velvet’. It examines reports of this episode as it unfolded along Australia’s northern coastline to show how frontier sexuality was mapped onto national borders and racial and gender identifications. As Ann Stoler argues in her work on carnality and imperial power, ‘the management of the sexual practices of colonizer and colonized was fundamental to the colonial order of things and [that] discourses of sexuality at once classified colonial subjects into

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1 Terms historicised in this article remain offensive and have continuing power to offend. This article attempts to dispel and challenge the meanings conveyed by the term ‘Black Velvet’ by tracing its use in print media and thereby intervening in the attitudes it disseminated.
distinct human kinds while policing the domestic recesses of imperial rule’. This paper draws attention to the impressions in print of these categories, to print’s expressions and suppressions. It divulges the role of colloquial language or slang in the ordering of social kinds – referring to the grouping of people by shared traits that are socially determined. It argues the epidermal enmeshments of interracial sexuality constantly undermined those categories which were reiterated and racialised through colloquial language. The racial designations shored up by the oblique use of ‘Black Velvet’ in print construed Aboriginal women as susceptible to white men’s purportedly unrestrainable seduction and soliciting, as distinct from their depiction as vulnerable to ‘Asiatic’ degeneracy and aggression. Meanwhile Aboriginal men, said to be the real instigators of the traffic in Aboriginal women, were accused of prostituting their women and thereby of profligating their own property rights, not to mention of instigating unsanctioned trade. The presence as much as the absence of ‘Black Velvet’ in print shows that colloquial language was a means for white colonisers to boast ownership over Aboriginal women’s bodies. The scandal erupted around the trade in pearl shell yet the two were construed as commodities and overlayed with a sense of settler entitlement to the bounty of the land that expressly denied ‘Asiatics’ right of entry.

Print coverage of the Japanese pearler scandal negotiated a conflict between foreign trade and the territorial claims of settler-colonialism as played out through sexual access to Indigenous women. It showed that these incursions of capital introduced competing claims from other nation-states, in Japan’s case with escalating imperial ambitions. The relations then forged between competing masculinities on the northern frontier pushed to the fore the intimacies that trade invariably relied on and the challenges they posed to established and tolerated patterns of interracial sexuality, blithely and even boastfully encapsulated in the colloquialism ‘Black Velvet’. As Ruth Balint has argued:

At the farthest edge of the continent from the centers of European power, pearling and the seascape it inhabited came to embody the possibility of the erosion of officially sanctioned notions of home and nation, a threat personified by the presence of Asian men and their unions with Aboriginal women.

A study of newspaper reports of these interracial sexual unions reveals the discrimination against, and regulation of, relations between peoples without citizenship, Asian and Aboriginal, under the white Australia policy. Scholars such as Ann Curthoys, Regina Ganter and Minoru Hokari have argued that the history of Australia’s northern shore reveals the complex interplay of migration, diaspora and identity. This history realigns the axis of colonial history from the binary of indigenous/settler relations to the conflation of identity categories

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2 Stoler 2002: 145.
3 Haslanger and Saul 2006.
4 Balint 2012: 544.
5 The Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902 (Cth) and Naturalization Act 1903 (Cth) excluded Aboriginal people as well as people from Asian countries from citizenship. See Reynolds 2003: xi.
forged by multiculturalism and migration. The ‘interior frontier’ accustomed by settler/Indigenous exchange was impinged by the exterior frontier presented by the pearlers, yet internalised by the intimacies and heterogeneity initiated along its contact lines. Within print reports non-white interracial sex could only be imagined as prostitution or sexual aggression and these were then configured as a hostile infringement of national borders. The sexual labour of Aboriginal women, always inferred as an aberrant trade between Aboriginal and Japanese men, was drawn into diplomatic tensions and, as I will show, newly imagined on the nation’s daily pages within a metaphorics of ‘poaching’. In stark contrast sexual unions between white men and Aboriginal women were either silenced, decried by humanitarians on rare occasions, or culturally inscribed by the euphemism ‘Black Velvet’.

If the circulation of social types, such as the ‘Lubra’, ‘Piccaninny’, ‘Jacky Jacky’ and ‘King Billy’ among many others, was a mainstay of the enterprise of colonial print culture, the term ‘Black Velvet’ stood apart. Unlike ‘Stud’ or ‘Gin Stud’ it did not denote a type but rather, like ‘Bride Capture’, referred to a racialised social phenomenon, specifically sexual. ‘Black Velvet’ was barely present in print and given its common usage the omission, I will argue, is telling of more than simply editorial tact. ‘Black Velvet’ evoked a racialised register of touch, not only of Aboriginal women’s surfaces, but also of white men’s contact. Clearly it already specified interracial sexual relations since Aboriginal women were never said to be ‘Black Velvet’ to their own men. Rather Aboriginal men were said to consign their women to ‘Black Velvet’ by trafficking them. The expression made slanting reference to the genital interior of Aboriginal women as inducing a particular sensation in white men. While white women were clothed and trimmed in black velvet, Aboriginal women were assigned nakedness by this expression, their surfaces made more tactile by their colour. But when the faltering usage of ‘Black Velvet’ is contextualised in the print scandal around Japanese pearlers it reveals that this contact was colloquially restricted to white men.

In Ann McGrath’s classic and wide-ranging history of the interracial sexual relations referenced by ‘Black Velvet’ in the Northern Territory, she notes the term originated as nineteenth-century military slang, naming an Irish infusion of stout, champagne and cider. From the first, the term belonged to a fraternity of men. It seems a stanza from Henry Lawson’s 1899 ‘Ballad of The Rouseabout’ first inscribed it in Australian print (since his verse nearly always appeared initially in newspapers) as the recourse of the lonely bush itinerant. Yet a number

7 Stoler 1997: 199.
8 See Conor 2013b.
9 See Conor 2012.
10 ‘Stud’ denoted Aboriginal women on pastoral stations kept for white station management and hands, much as ‘buck’ referred to single young Aboriginal men. The Northern Territory register of wards was colloquially known as The Stud Book. Barker 1966: 324.
11 They were however said to be captured brides and ceremonially violated by Aboriginal men. See Conor 2013a.
12 McGrath 1984.
of authors, such as Victorian squatter Edward Curr, had earlier commented on
the skin of Aboriginal women as ‘particularly velvet-like to the touch’. The first
overt referencing in print of ‘Black Velvet’ as the trade in Aboriginal women’s
bodies appeared in 1907 in Perth’s Sunday Times. An anonymous feature by two
‘Pressmen’ reflected on their travels through the Ashburton region to Onslow,
Western Australia. On a number of station homesteads, they had heard of
‘special gins’ reserved for ‘the managers’ benefit’. It was in this context of ‘evil
association’ that these white male journalists parsed ‘black velvet’ from ‘jokes’
shared between managers and station hands to print. Aboriginal women were
thus characterised in terms of the ‘susceptibility of the “black velvet” about
the place while the powers-that-be wink the other eye’. Even without the prior
impress and reiteration of print to propel ‘Black Velvet’ into common parlance,
this appears with a knowing wink.

This half-knowing had long cloaked settler expression about interracial sexual
activity and white sexual aggression. Indeed in print readers had long been
advised that details of sexual engagement by settlers were beyond permissible
description and thus unprintable. In an emigrant’s guide of 1849 the shepherds
and stockmen of the bush are described as so degenerate with vice, and their
activities of such ‘barbarism’ as to ‘dare scarcely be alluded to in print’. Evidence
given in court regarding the aggravated assault on an Aboriginal
woman in 1881 in Singleton, New South Wales by a group of men was ‘unfit for
publication’, notably because it ‘disclosed a state of things highly discreditable
to the parties implicated’. A suppressed language of guarded references to
unmentionable acts fed a prurient interest in the native woman, while it served
to protect otherwise ‘discreditable’ white men by drawing a veil of half-knowing
around their activities. Both the traditional rites ascribed to her sexuality, such as
‘Bride Capture’, along with this illicit but tolerated sexual access by white men,
construed the Aboriginal woman as a figure of sexual excess utterly devoid of
agency. It was never considered that Aboriginal women of their own volition
might form intimate relations with men of their choosing that were meaningful
to them in terms of attraction, pleasure, or attachment.

Recent scholarship has explored the ‘spectrum’ of sexual relationships in frontier
and post-frontier settings, which ranged from abduction and aggravated rape
to consensual, companionate marriage, between settler men and Aboriginal
women. Arguably lack of consent disrupts any such continuity since aside
from penetration, pregnancy and venereal disease, no other commonality exists
between sexual assault and sexual relations. However, in the print coverage
examined, Aboriginal women’s consent is almost impossible to gauge for a
number of reasons. Firstly, interracial sex comprised such a violation of social

13  Curr 1883: 283.
15 Mann 1849: 16.
16 The Bench found both defendants guilty, and sentenced John Trunley and Gerald Thompson to
each pay a fine of five pounds, in default one month’s imprisonment. Maitland Mercury & Hunter
River General Advertiser, 3 November 1881: 7.
norms it was confused with violation itself. Secondly, Aboriginal women were characterised as so devoid of chastity or modesty as to be unable to be ‘outraged’. Thirdly, they were routinely typed as ‘chattels’, as so subjected by their men’s tyranny any agency was subsumed beneath Aboriginal men’s trafficking of their bodies. Frontier sexual activity has been documented mostly within pastoral, mining and sealing scenarios, but also within the domestic labour of Aboriginal women in settler homes. Indigenous women’s sexuality had long been seen as a frontier resource, a ‘necessary evil’ required for irrepressible colonial manliness in regions unpopulated by white women. ‘If you were to put rams in with ewes what would you expect?’ one sheep farmer explained to the South Australian 1899 select committee adding that ‘men are placed in positions where for ten or fifteen years they never see a white woman. In the interior, there are a lot of these flash young lubras about, and you can hardly expect men not to touch them’. Aside from the indignation of a handful of sympathetic humanitarians or piously appalled missionaries and clergy, Aboriginal women’s sexual encounters with white men were secreted away from the wider public, or given glancing acknowledgement as a ‘necessary evil’ in remote regions long believed to endure a ‘frightful want of females’.

The pearling print scandal rent apart the veil conventionally drawn across interracial sexual activity. The concealment had been enabled by what Regina Ganter identifies as ‘the indistinctness between corroboration and reiteration’ in the characterising of all interracial gendered contact as prostitution. Ganter finds in missionary and ethnographic publications a ‘mirroring of accounts which then became cemented as the master narrative of race relations of the pearling and bêche-de-mer industry of North Queensland’. When the ‘lubras on luggers’ episode broke a new element was introduced to the degenerate frontier – non-white interracial sex. The print panic that ensued revealed that Aboriginal women were debarred to ‘Asiatic’ men. It exposed that much of the impetus for the ‘protection’ and ‘assimilation’ regimes: the regulation and containment of Aboriginal women’s sexuality, was in fact rhetoric. Yet when it came to ‘Asiatic’ men this ‘protection’ was emphatically enforced. Their purported aggression was publically exposed under nationally inscribed limits of access.

Under the Protection Acts of state administrations a number of legislative measures were designed to guard women and girls from any sexual activity with white men, be it consensual, contractual or abusive (usually involving their removal to training homes and reserves). In 1934 the Minister for the Interior JA Perkins issued an exhaustive statement of the Commonwealth’s policy in dealing with the Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory under which the protection of Aboriginal women ‘from moral abuse on the part of Europeans

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19 Mann 1849: 16.
and other races’ numbered as the fourth objective. However, ‘Asiatic’ men’s sexual involvement evidently presented a far worse evil. The press treatment of the pearling incident underscored that hand-in-glove with the transition from Protection era to Assimilation administrations went the active repression of this practice in public discourse – except when it involved ‘coloured aliens’. The racially delimited slang ‘Black Velvet’ was indicative of this cordoned access. The pearling incident offered an opportunity to reconfigure and reinforce a discourse of colonial chivalry – ‘White men are saving brown women from brown men’ as Gayatri Spivak describes it. Yet here the ‘brown men’ were not just the Aboriginal men accused of prostituting their women. ‘Brown men’ also referred to the Japanese men who were labour and trade competitors and non-assimilable to national masculinity. The scandal provided another opportunity to shift culpability from white men to brown.

The 1936 print scandal was presaged by prohibitions in Western Australia on co-habiting and marriage between Japanese men and Aboriginal women in that state’s Aborigines Act 1905 (WA) which created longstanding regulation and discrimination against interracial couples, along with the concentrated removal of their children to missions and reserves. It presumed that women who engaged in consensual relations were prostitutes. Miscegenation became a heightened concern for administrators just as the assimilation regime adopted by some states sought to resolve the half-caste ‘menace’ through a policy based on biological absorption. In addition, for Europeans sexual activity by ‘natives’ outside marriage was delimited to one-off prostitution, longer-term concubinage or abduction and rape. They largely ignored their obligations once their sexual involvement drew them into kinship and totemic relationships based on reciprocity and ongoing outlay. Their subsequent sexual activity with unsanctioned women, or their failure to meet their obligations, could be met by violent reprisals from Aboriginal men.

Despite decades of unheeded reports of violence toward Aboriginal women by white pearling masters it was Aboriginal women’s sexual activity with ‘alien’ men, particularly ‘Asiatics’, which finally prompted dramatically contrasting government interventions and media exposure. Aside from the Pearl Shell Fisheries Acts in Western Australia in 1871 and 1873, prohibiting Aboriginal women from pearling operations and vessels, and an 1898 amendment to the

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22 Courier-Mail, 4 January 1934: 13.
23 In debate on the Aborigines Act 1905 (WA) pastoralists successfully lobbied to reduce the minimum fine for cohabiting from 50 to five pounds. Haebich 2001: 239.
25 The story of the marriage of Okamura and Mary Masatora of Broome and that of their children and grandchildren is told by Nakano 1980. For a more detailed telling of their story and that of many such marriages in Broome see Ganter 1999b; Ganter 2006. See also Choo 1995; Stephenson 2003.
27 See McGrath 1984: 252.
28 See Kwaymullina 2001: 57.
29 An Act to regulate the hiring and service of Aboriginal natives, engaged in the Pearl Shell Fishery; and to prohibit the employment of women therein 1871(WA), Pearl Shell Fishery Regulation Act 1873 (WA). It was these interventions that led to the uptake of Asian and Islander labour on luggers to replace Aboriginal divers. The appointment of a Commission of Inquiry occurred in 1883. Hill 1994.
‘BLACK VELVET’ AND ‘PURPLE INDIGNATION’

Pearl Shell and Beche-de-mer Fisheries Act 1881 (Qld) in Queensland prohibiting ‘aliens’ from procuring boat licences,\(^{30}\) violence against them had met with pervasive apathy, evasion, resignation, and rhetoric. Instead the focus of anxiety was on Asian-Aboriginal cohabitation, but this was itself precipitated by state ambivalence towards Aboriginal employment in the pearl-shell industry. Also shaping reactions was the competition for depleting shell beds outside the 3 mile territorial limit with the more organised, efficient and entrepreneurial Japanese divers.\(^{31}\) The print scandal on Aboriginal prostitution to Japanese men punctured ongoing diplomatic tensions around the numerical dominance of ‘Asiatics’ in the industry – yet the crews were exempted from the provisions of the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (Cth).\(^{32}\) The prostitution scandal broke as fears of espionage and alien intrusion, debates over territorial boundaries and poaching, and Japanese technological, numerical and market dominance reached a climax. But these resource, property and trade relations were applicable also to women’s bodies, and their distribution and allotment also came under state jurisdiction.

Any accusation of indecency by white men had long been dismissed with the argument that native women did not know ‘how to set a true value on chastity’. More to the point, Aboriginal men ‘shared in the wages of iniquity earned by their women’. These notions were transferred from nineteenth-century middle-class constructs of prostitution which abnegated procurers of all responsibility. Britain’s Contagious Diseases Act of 1866 served as the blueprint for a raft of legislative attempts in colonial Australia to regulate a pool of disease-free women for the sexual outlet of men – particularly men serving in Her Majesty’s army or navy – through the creation of a prostitute register, compulsory medical examination and confinement in ‘Lock’ Hospitals. The prostitute was thought to be at once ‘the necessary object of “normal” male sexual needs, yet representative of an aberrant form of female sexuality’.\(^{33}\) Across racial lines however, ‘native’ women were always already ‘fallen’, and in failing to privatise and constrain sexual access within monogamous marriage it was ‘native’ men who were deemed most culpable. This line of argument appeared in print in 1885 after four ‘respected and industrious pioneers’ were murdered on the Daly River by ‘blood-thirsty savages’. These settlers were afterwards suspected of ‘outraging’ and abducting Aboriginal women by the Aborigines’ Friends’ Society. Their defender, Alfred Giles, scoffed at any suggestion of a ‘violation of chastity and purity where chasteness is unknown’. The very idea of ‘chastity among their women’ he famously said was ‘preposterous. Not less preposterous, therefore, is the idea of the black women being outraged, unless it is by stopping their supply of tobacco.’\(^{34}\)

\(^{30}\) Pearl Shell and Beche-de-mer Fisheries Acts Amendment Act 1898 (Qld). As Ganter found, Japanese pearlers got around this legislation through ‘dummying’ or nominal ownership of boats on behalf of Japanese captains. Ganter 1994: 130.

\(^{31}\) See Ganter 1994.


\(^{33}\) Daniels 1984: 3.

\(^{34}\) Alfred Giles, *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 6 March 1886: 3.
In 1905 a Royal Commission on the condition of the Natives undertaken by Walter Roth, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, altered the language by which the sexual traffic of Aboriginal women and girls became public through print. Measures had been taken to protect Aboriginal women from ‘blackbirding’ by Australian pearlers and ‘Asiatic aliens’ in Western Australia. It was in press reports of this inquiry that prostitution between the ‘gins and the Malay and other Asiatic pearling crews’ was first aired to the wider public. Soon after the Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance of 1911 prohibited white men and Asians from ‘habitually consorting’ with Aboriginal women, and in 1933 such ‘carnal knowledge’ became an offence. The Northern Territory Aboriginals Act 1910 (SA) prohibited persons of the ‘Asiatic or Negro’ races from employing Aboriginal women. Already in 1899 concern had been expressed about ‘houses’ in Mackay said to be servicing Kanakas and Japanese. Raymond Evans found that the Queensland government imported Japanese women to serve as ‘suitable outlets’ for the ‘sexual passion’ of ‘coloured alien’ or migrant workers. He claims that in 1897 over 100 such women, known as Karayuki-san, were operating in Childers, Innisfail and Cairns. Despite a ban placed on the immigration of Japanese women to Queensland in 1898 (and any prostitutes by the Immigration Restriction Act), Japanese prostitutes on Thursday Island were said to enjoy ‘a remarkably prosecution-free existence’. Any assurance that sexual activity could be channelled through appropriate racial conduits however was undone in 1910, by the journalist Frank Fox who reported that the ‘Malay proas, Chinese junks, and Japanese sampans’ were behind the ‘vile treatment meted out to the natives’. This focus on Japanese aggression can also be situated in the context of Australia’s federation movement from the 1890s and Japan’s vehement protest against the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, which grouped their nation with Africa and Polynesia as inferior to Western countries. Anxieties already elevated due to Japan’s naval and military victories against Russia and China were heightened by the marked dominance of Japanese contract labourers in the pearling, trepang, mining and sugar industries from the 1880s. Their exemption from the Immigration Restriction Act was in part to appease the British who as allies of the Japanese could be influenced by their demands which included that their émigré nationals be protected from exploitation. The Japanese, determined

35 Cited in Kwaymullina 2001: 56.
38 McGrath 1984: 268.
39 McGrath 1984: 265.
40 Cited in Evans 1984: 139.
41 Under the ‘Queensland Vagrancy Act under section 50 (v) [Vagrants, Gaming and Other Offences Act 1931 (Qld)]’, any house in which an ‘Asiatic’ woman lived could be considered a brothel. Ganter 1999b. Ganter has found Japanese women were classified as prostitutes merely by their presence. Ganter 1998.
43 Fox 1910: 140.
44 Lake and Reynolds 2008.
45 See Murakami 2001; Lake and Reynolds 2008.
to assert national prestige, curtailed the prostitution of Japanese women along Australia’s northern shore, signing the 1912 Convention Against Traffic in Women and Children and repatriating many women.\(^{47}\)

Illicit trafficking however did not merely imply the crossing of borders but the contravention of otherwise racially discrete identities, all too often within borders. In 1930, Mary M Bennett published her generalised account of Aboriginal women ‘wronged’ on stations, supplementing their ‘meager resources by trading in prostitution’ to withstand semi-starvation.\(^{48}\) Bennett reported on the ‘illegal recruiting of natives and other abuses’ on the northern coastline by pearling luggers.\(^{49}\) Bennett’s complaint was not specific to the race of the perpetrators or procurers however. She gave evidence at the Royal Commission of Enquiry (1934–35) into the ‘Condition and Treatment of Aborigines’ in Western Australia headed by HD Moseley. The Moseley commission was undoubtedly another turning point in the public disclosure of interracial sex. Bennett argued prostitution of Aboriginal women was ‘universal’ in the outback and that the Aborigines Act purported to protect women, yet, ‘some of the police were among the worst offenders’.\(^{50}\) Thus it was just as mounting evidence of the crimes and misdemeanors of white men was exposed to public view that Australian newspapers seized upon the prostitution of Aboriginal women to Japanese pearlers.

In 1934 a Presbyterian missionary on Mornington Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Rev Robert H Wilson, told a reporter that the ‘chief source of danger was the visiting Japanese’ who were a ‘menace to the natives’. In a descriptive shift from more explicit understanding about the abuses by white men (which had by now prompted an ordinance prohibiting the entry of white men into Aboriginal Reserves in the Northern Territory and their ‘consorting with native women’) Wilson wrote of the Japanese, ‘They have very low standards so far as women are concerned, and they ill-treat the aboriginal women in such a way that they arouse the anger of the aboriginal men. Then the natives wreak their vengeance on the first white man who comes along.’\(^{52}\) In the same year the Argus reported the chief protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory, Dr Cecil H Cook, tightened the regulation of Aboriginal women and ‘half-castes’ ostensibly to afford them greater protection. Cook drew attention to the ‘grave problem presented by the unrestricted inter-marriage of alien coloured races with aborigines and half-castes’. The result he stated was a ‘hybrid coloured population of a very low order’ which constituted a ‘perennial economic and social problem’.\(^{53}\) Children born of Asian fathers and Aboriginal mothers did indeed pose a problem to protectors advocating assimilation through biological absorption. For unlike the ‘half’ and ‘quarter-caste’ girls whose children’s and

\(^{47}\) Nagata 2004.
\(^{48}\) Bennett 1930: 115.
\(^{49}\) Bennett 1930: 118.
\(^{50}\) Argus, 23 March 1934: 10.
\(^{51}\) Argus, 14 May 1936: 7.
\(^{52}\) Courier-Mail, 12 January 1934: 6.
\(^{53}\) Argus, 30 June 1934: 17.
grandchildren’s aboriginality would ultimately be purportedly extinguished by their successive partnering with white men, these ‘half-caste coloured aliens’ embodied miscegenation with none of the perceived benefits of assimilation – of ‘breeding out the colour’. Indeed they constituted a new and unwelcome racial element in Australia, combining two elements already targeted for eradication, first through the *Immigration Restriction Act* and secondly just as the policy of assimilation was being adopted by most states.

The protective sentiment particularly towards ‘half-caste’ Aboriginal girls – earmarked for marriage with white men to produce paler-skinned children – intensified as the presence of Chinese, Malay, Koepanger (single men indentured from South East Asia) and Japanese pearlers grew along Australia’s northern coast. Referred to as the ‘flotsam and jetsam of the Pacific’ they comprised the undifferentiated entity ‘alien’, and ‘Asiatic’. Under the *Pearling Act 1912* (WA) it was illegal for Japanese to own an interest in a pearling operation or even to rent boats. The divers worked under extremely difficult conditions. Over 600 Japanese men died between 1878 and 1941 working in the Torres Strait. They sought sea pearl oyster *Pinctada maxima* which was the principal material in the production of buttons and knife handles, before plastic became common fare. By 1920 80 per cent of the world’s supply of mother-of-pearl shell came from the northern port town of Broome. The pearling industry was under pressure from the onset of World War One when markets contracted. As the world economy slid into depression in the 1930s, the market came under additional pressures, both from the production of plastic substitutes and Japanese cultured pearls.

Within the stratification of ethnic identity the ‘Asiatic’ was beyond even ‘low-caste’ European-heritage men, in imaginings of the corruption of Aboriginal women. Lorna Kaino argues relations of reciprocity and exchange that had been established from trade and co-habitation between Macassan traders and Aborigines continued in relations with the Japanese, Malaysians, Indonesians, Chinese and Singaporeans, Timorese and Filipinos now in the pearling and trepang industry. In the interwar period however Koepangers were accused

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54 It was in the 1932–33 report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals in the Northern Territory that Cecil Cook made his now infamous call to ‘breed out the colour’. However it is less known that his statement was a defensive response to Asian-Aboriginal cohabitation. The full statement reads, ‘In the Territory the mating of an aboriginal with any person other than an aboriginal is prohibited. The mating of coloured aliens with any female of part aboriginal blood is also forbidden. Every endeavour is being made to breed out the colour by elevating female half-castes to the white standard with a view to their absorption by mating into the white population’. Report on the Administration of the Northern Territory for the Year Ended 30th June, 1933, <http://archive.aiatsis.gov.au/removeprotect/59849.pdf> (accessed 14 June 2013).


58 Nagata 1999: 30–43.


60 Moore 1994.

61 Kaino 2011.
of spreading venereal disease to ‘half-caste’ girls and the introduction of opium and gambling among ‘detribalised’ men was attributed to the Chinese. The Administrator of North Australia Lieutenant-Colonel RH Weddell endorsed this view. He told a Legacy Club Luncheon in 1934 that the visits of foreign pearling crews caused a ‘mixture of races’, along with the introduction of ‘Asiatic diseases’. He argued that it was ‘interference with aboriginal women’ that had caused the disturbances with Aborigines on the northern coast.

By ‘disturbances’ Weddell was referring to the 1932–33 killings of Japanese that followed a string of deaths of up to 75 non-Aborigines within mutinies and escapes over decades. In 1932, eight men were murdered in three separate incidents: five Japanese trepangers at Caledon Bay, and two white men and later a policeman investigating their deaths on Woodah Island in north-east Arnhem Land. Police, delayed by the wet season, pursued the men at Blue Mud Bay, where Constable Stewart McColl was speared in July. The police were later accused of handcuffing four women who were left under McColl’s watch with two Aboriginal trackers while their party went after the suspects. McColl is believed to have released all but one woman, Japarri, who called out for help (just before her death she told Ted Egan intercourse did not take place). McColl then fired on her husband Dagiar, who speared him. Accounts of the spearing of five Japanese trepangers later credited the testimony of the Aboriginal men who said they were responding to the Japanese beating and firing on them, as well as the mistreatment or misuse of their women. Yet the defence of women, even as a proprietary right by Yolngu and Djalkiripuyngu men, was not credited as evidence in the subsequent trials that convicted Dagiar, Merara (later quashed) and three sons of Wonggu (also eventually released).

An outcry among southern advocacy organisations led to Tuckiar’s (Dagiar) death sentence being overturned in the High Court. Yet Dagiar mysteriously disappeared in Darwin and it is widely believed he was lynched by police. A raid was proposed by the Administrator of Darwin and by the owner of the lugger the Japanese crewed since, he insisted, they were ‘honourable men’, ‘murdered while engaged in a peaceful occupation’, and the natives ‘must be taught a lesson otherwise there will be no chance of settling the wild parts of Australia’. With the Coniston massacre of 1928 still fresh in people’s memory a groundswell of denunciation for the practice of indiscriminate punitive raids sprang up, spearheaded by anthropologist Donald Thomson.

62 Argus, 16 August 1934: 4.
63 See Ganter 1994: 45.
64 Dewar 1993.
65 Egan 1996.
68 Quoting Mr Keppert in Sydney Morning Herald, 6 September 1933: 13.
69 Attwood 2005. Also protesting calls for a punitive expedition were the Association for the Protection of Native Races, unions, the Council of Churches, the Church Missionary Society, the British Commonwealth League and the Anti-Slavery Society. Prime Minister Lyons denied a punitive expedition was being considered, but rather an ‘arresting party’ would be despatched. In Sydney Morning Herald, 6 September 1933: 13.
As Mickey Dewar argues, sympathy arising from the 1932 Caledon Bay case was expressed in terms of Aboriginal men protecting their women from violent Japanese, even though Fred Gray, an English trepanger fishing at the site and friendly with the Balamumu, stated the elder Wonggo did not complain of Japanese violence against women or of them reneging on any payment. Thomson’s report taken from Wonggo (father of the three warriors jailed for life and then released after Thomson’s advocacy) attested to his defending his land and people from ‘the white and Japanese despoilers of their women’. Significantly, as the pearling scandal unfolded sympathy turned against Aboriginal men who were scapegoated as ‘trafficking’ to the Japanese who simultaneously ‘poached’. Aboriginal women were cast as abused and without recourse to protection except by white men. A series of reports emerged in the press from September 1935 including ‘Blacks Sell Womenfolk to Lugger Crews’, in the Argus; ‘Reports of Sale of Lubras’, in the Sydney Morning Herald; ‘Black Women Exploited’, in the Herald; ‘Lubras on Luggers’ in the Canberra Times; ‘Japanese Pearl Poachers’, in Daily Telegraph; ‘Lubras Sold. Japanese Hamper Mission Work. Barter Increases’, in the Sydney Morning Herald; ‘Lubras on Pearling Vessels’, in the Northern Standard, and ‘Native Girls in Luggers’, in the Herald. Run together the semiotics of these headlines show a suturing of poaching to prostitution. An illicit sexual trade drew a competing masculinity to the nation’s unprotected and vulnerable shores. Colloquial language, such as ‘Lubra’, designated the sexuality of Aboriginal women as an exploited yet squandered commodity by ‘Blacks’, who like the Japanese comprise a category evacuated of all else but sexual vice. Yet nowhere did the Australian colloquialism ‘Black Velvet’ appear throughout this print scandal.

A closer analysis of two of these newspapers’ reportage reveals the discursive workings in this shift of culpability for the abuse of Aboriginal women to ‘Asiatics’ aided by Aboriginal men. In September 1936 an interview in the Canberra Times with Monseigneur Gsell, Principal of the Bathurst Island Catholic Mission Station, imprinted in the wider nation. It bannered, ‘SORDID TRAFFIC IN ABORIGINAL GIRLS: Barter With Japanese Luggers’. He claimed girls as young as ten years were sent to the luggers and gave the instance of one girl who leapt from a lugger and ‘got ashore four times in an effort to escape, but eventually was speared in the leg by a native and dragged back to the Japanese’. Gsell claimed that at first the girls protest vigorously, but eventually they ‘await

73 The Argus, 20 September 1935.
74 Sydney Morning Herald, 23 September 1935.
75 Herald, Melbourne, 24 September 1936.
77 Daily Telegraph, 26 May 1936.
78 Sydney Morning Herald, 25 September 1936.
80 The Herald, 21 June 1937.
81 Gsell had in fact been reporting on the growing trade since 1928. See Morris 2010.
the arrival of the luggers of their own will, attracted by the lucrative gifts they receive from the Japanese’.\textsuperscript{82} Unusually Gsell introduces consent, yet it is here posed around the vulnerability of children, since adult women’s consent was only raised in terms of the violation of men’s property. The women were thought to have no property in their own persons, and no modesty by which to protect it. The sexual vulnerability of children did not persist as a driver for government intervention since miscegenation rather than child protection was in fact the primary moral impetus. By 1936 the call for coastal patrols of foreign vessels due to the sexual abuse of Aboriginal women was hitched to notions of border protection and national identity as articulated through the white Australia policy. Gsell provided potent imagery of a sexual and racial transgression mapped onto a remote, unprotected border. It is little wonder Aboriginal men were initially suspected of colluding with invading Japanese during the war years.\textsuperscript{83}

The 1936 \textit{Canberra Times} article was brought immediately before the House of Representatives by Mr McCall (United Australia Party, NSW) who was assured by the Minister for the Interior, Mr Paterson, that ‘inquiries were already being made, and that the allegations would be fully investigated’.\textsuperscript{84} Gsell called for more funding for the mission’s rations as a means to undercut recourse to prostitution. But for the \textit{Argus} Gsell’s revelations of ‘interference with lubras’ spelled ‘flagrant invasions of territorial waters by the Japanese’. The paper sent its ‘special representative’ in Darwin to assess the effectiveness of patrols by the \textit{Larrakia}, the federal government’s patrol-boat, but deemed it ineffective and futile and pointed to the ‘urgent need for effective policing of the northern coastline of Australia’. The \textit{Argus} said the women had told their representative that they were either attracted to the ‘lavish supplies of tobacco’ or ‘beaten into submission by their husbands who had been promised food by the Japanese’.\textsuperscript{85} Once again it was the ‘aborigines’ readiness to trade their women’ that focused attention. The possibility of women’s relations of mutual exchange with Japanese was overlooked. It was certainly never considered that the encounter between Japanese men and Aboriginal women might be enacted within diverse relations as distinct from each other as consensual cohabitation, contractual soliciting, or abduction and rape.\textsuperscript{86} Aboriginal women and Japanese men each were assigned singular sexual modalities – prostitution and violation.

By June the following year the \textit{Canberra Times} detailed a report on the trafficking of Aboriginal women to foreign and Australian pearling luggers, prepared by Captain Haultain from a patrol launch, and placed before the Department of the Interior. Paterson flew north to investigate the ‘alarming proportion’ in the traffic in Aboriginal women. He argued that the Commonwealth Government needed to enforce the Aboriginal Ordinance to ‘protect the natives from their simple

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Canberra Times}, 25 September 1936: 5.
\textsuperscript{83} See Morris 2004.
\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Argus}, 16 September 1936: 5.
\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Argus}, 21 November 1936: 27.
\textsuperscript{86} Ganter details the extensive familial networks created though cohabitation in Ganter 2006.
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greed for the luxuries of the white man’. Here a begrudging acknowledgement of economic motives was subsumed under moral causes: but greed not need incited men to ‘barter’ their women and girls. A special vessel, the Vigilant, was under construction in Sydney expressly to patrol the Arnhem Land coast to ‘eliminate the traffic in Aboriginal women’.

The Canberra Times was quickly dissatisfied with government response to the affair, airing the Rev JW Burton’s address to the Australian Missionary Conference in which he accused the Commonwealth of ‘shirking its responsibilities and creating a “STAIN ON OUR HONOUR”’. Like ‘velvet’, ‘stain’ is evocative language alluding perhaps to a kind of racial incontinence. The Argus too reported Burton’s address in which he spoke of the treatment of ‘our’ Aboriginal women by ‘salacious brutes’ from luggers claiming his evidence of their mistreatment, if published, would cause Australians to become ‘purple with indignation’. Paterson however rebuked Burton arguing, as of old, ‘it was the aborigines themselves who acquiesced because the men freely bartered their women to the crews of the luggers in return for flour tobacco &c.’. Again the question of women’s consent was subsumed under the property rights of their men, who however, misused those rights. Gsell instituted a novel approach in which he targeted children for education by buying 135 little girls as brides to ‘save them from child marriage, polygamy and prostitution’. Gsell was later referred to as ‘the Bishop with a hundred wives’. As Ganter found in her study of Moravian missionary Nicolas Hey at Mapoon and the prohibitions he placed on polygamy, Gsell had likewise ‘successfully appropriated the role of the male elders in allocating material resources and regulating sexual relations: he had restructured social relations from polygamous gerontocracy to monogamous patriarchy’. Meanwhile 11 Japanese luggers were fired on with ‘several bursts of machine gun’ at Guribah Island in early April 1937 and 17 luggers boarded. They were assembled, the ‘restrictions against illegal landings on the Australian coastline’ were explained to them, and then they were released, to avoid ‘international complications’.

88 Canberra Times, 2 May 1938: 2.
89 Canberra Times, 6 April 1937: 2.
90 Argus, 6 April 1937: 10.
91 Argus, 8 April 1937: 12.
93 The reference came in 1950 from the NT administrator Abbott who described Gsell’s system of buying baby girls from the elder men to stop the ‘tribal practice of handing young girls of six or seven over to the old men of the tribe.’ Gsell removed them to the mission station, ‘where the nuns looked after them, and as they grew up they married Christianized native boys.’ Any mention of prostitution to Japanese seems forgotten by 1950.
94 Ganter 1999a: 279.
95 Argus, 6 April 1937: 9.
Riled, the *Argus* then attacked the government for the ‘cool manner’ in which the Federal Ministry admitted the traffic in Aboriginal women to foreign craft was ‘common knowledge for years’, even of Japanese ‘invading’ Aboriginal reserves. The *Argus* fulminated,

yet the Cabinet is only now preparing to consider this hideous scandal, which is a disgrace to Australia’s name. There has been evidence in the recent episode of a disposition to be lenient with the intruders so as to avoid possible international complications. Australians generally would not desire the Government’s solemn duty of protecting the aborigines to be left undone because of such unworthy timidity.\(^96\)

The Anglican Synod of Ballarat was likewise incensed demanding, ‘Why is it that the great British Empire behaves like a damned coward when it faces any foreign power in the world except Germany?’ The Rev BH Dewhurst also criticised the failure of Australian authorities to ‘take prompt action to protect aboriginal women in the north against raiders from another country’. Mr Dewhurst insisted, ‘Whoever heard of a Government that allowed nationals of a foreign power to interfere with its women and decline to make a protest?’\(^97\) Within a week their calls would be answered. The Aboriginal Ordinance was amended to allow for the confiscation of ‘foreign pearl shell poachers’ found illegally in the vicinity of Aboriginal reserves on the coastline of the Northern Territory or Western Australia. Australian territorial waters were thus closed to foreign vessels as a ‘protective measure’ afforded to Aboriginal women from the ‘attentions of the crews of foreign pearling craft’ by their ‘invasion of these waters’ from Darwin to Arnhem Land.\(^98\) Paterson briefed delegates to the 1937 Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities,\(^99\) the first meeting of the heads of the state Aboriginal protection and welfare boards. And in early 1941 Vesteys agreed to relinquish its lease over Melville Island and the Tiwi Islands were gazetted as Aboriginal reserve with a control base established at Garden Point.\(^100\)

On 10 June 1937 two more boats were captured in Boucaut Bay, Arnhem Land, and escorted to Darwin. The crew was released, reportedly because there was no room at Fanny Bay gaol.\(^101\) Paterson continued to stress the difficulty of government intervention in Aboriginal men trafficking their women. He wrote to the Ballarat branch of the Labor party assuring them that ‘nothing is being left undone to protect aboriginal women, despite the practice of selling them engaged in by their own kith and kin’.\(^102\) He asserted to the *Argus* a month later that ‘The Patrol Service has come to stay’, as long as ‘a vestige of the traffic in
aboriginal women remained, a traffic which is carried on by male aboriginals who barter their women for flour and tobacco, and must be utterly stamped out'. Patterson was determined, he said, to enforce the law against ‘any person, white or coloured, who engages in unlawful poaching or immoral trafficking in aborigines [who] may expect the penalty of the law’. He was reported as saying ‘protection would now be afforded aboriginal women from the attentions of the crews of foreign pearling craft’ adding that steps would be taken to ‘assure prompt action to deal with vessels found illegally in territorial waters’. Poaching specifically invokes the illegal removal of resources by ‘aliens’. Trafficking, as distinct from trading, invokes the illegal exploitation of contraband materials across borders. The new measures were run together in print reports: ‘Action to provide for the effective policing of valuable pearlshell beds in Australian territorial waters and to guard against interference with aboriginal women by the crews of foreign pearling luggers, was taken yesterday by the Commonwealth Government, under amendments of the Aboriginal Ordinance proclaimed in a special Commonwealth gazette.’

Placed together, notions of trespass over Aboriginal women’s bodies was seamlessly sutured over the trespass of national sovereignty.

In March 1938 a new charge was brought against a Japanese lugger intercepted near Melville Island in the Darwin Police Court and reported under a Canberra Times headline ‘LUBRAS ON LUGGER’. Women testified that they had rowed out to the lugger but as their ‘evidence was conflicting’ and ‘Musumoto’, in charge of lugger D 45, denied their being on board, the case was dismissed. As noted, throughout this print panic the idiom ‘Black Velvet’ was never used in relation to Japanese and Aboriginal sexual exchange, despite its prior appearance in print, nor were the terms ‘combo’ or ‘burnt cork’ applied to their unions. Instead references were made to poaching and trafficking, evoking the contravention of national borders.

After the hostilities of World War Two commenced the image of Aboriginal men was rehabilitated. Japanese were accused of having ‘fraternised with the aborigines, whose women they wronged. Pretending friendship, they were a most evil influence along the coasts of North Australia’. However the ‘blackfellows of North Australia’ were said to have since ‘proved their worth as “allies”’ and as ‘good companions’ to Australian soldiers in guarding the northern coast. Indeed during the war men from Caledon Bay were pictured in 1944, in Wild Life magazine. The ‘fine character in the faces and bearing of these men’ showed they ‘prove to be noble and loyal’. Their previous reputation for ferocity derived from ‘a determination to preserve their land and their kindred from the depredations of intruders, whether white or yellow’. Needless to say their ‘main grievance was the visits of the Japanese pearlers, who used to carry off their women’.

103 Canberra Times, 22 June 1937: 2.
104 Canberra Times, 22 April 1937: 4.
105 Canberra Times, 8 March 1938: 4.
106 Barrett 1942: 12.
107 ‘People of the Territory’, Wild Life, June 1944: 175.
By 1958 the revised opinion on the Caledon Bay men presented them as having ‘refused to lend their women’ to the Japanese trepangers who slighted them by thinking ‘presents of tobacco gave them the right to take any native woman they wanted’. As Aboriginal men became defenders of the northern coast they were reinstated as defenders of their women. Japanese men presented an image of frontier masculinity as invaders who had sought access to Aboriginal women’s bodies. It was an image that settler-colonial men could least face about themselves and perhaps for this reason had to be resolutely repelled.

When fighting with Japan ceased and panic about ‘alien coloured’ sexual transgression subsided, ‘Black Velvet’ was revealed to the public, almost as the unveiling of a national secret, by *People* magazine in 1956. *People* was a Fairfax publication and the first Australian weekly to feature a topless model. Its exposure of ‘Black Velvet’ was bound to excite salacious interest. The article by Walkley award-winning journalist Harry Cox was bannered: ‘Black Velvet’ and bylined ‘: the name for seduction in the outback and means degradation of a once proud people’.

Cox argued this ‘hush-hush’ practice was known all over Northern Australia and went back to the first white settlers. But due to the impacts of ‘persecution, ill-treatment and near slavery’, as well as epidemic disease –but most importantly the growing presence of white women –the phenomenon of ‘Black Velvet’ had declined. ‘The white man is no longer lonely’, Cox declared, but for the ‘aboriginal harlot’ it was too late. By giving her money or trinkets she had learnt she could ‘make a trade of it’. Culpability shifted on to the women, who now instigated the trade in their own persons. Nevertheless Cox found an exemplar in the prospector and 38 stone ‘Tiny Swanson’ to convey a sense of side-show excess for white men who married Aboriginal women (who were still indistinguishable from procurers).

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Figure 1: Harry Cox, ‘Black Velvet’, People, 14 November 1956.

Source: Courtesy of Bauer Media.
Swanson was well known in the Northern Territory for strongman feats, but perhaps most famous for requiring a 2 ton crane to lift his body into his grave (he died of kidney failure at 58 years). A report on his death included a cartoon and Cox described his living arrangements as anarchic with chooks and a drunken pig roaming through the shed that was the marital home. The cartoon showed Tiny carrying his pet kangaroo under one arm, and his wife, Ruby, under the other.111

Clearly ‘Black Velvet’ continued to describe marginal sexual relations now within the remotest reaches of the interior. Though it specified white-Aboriginal sex, it took in the full ‘spectrum’ of sexual activity when it came to Aboriginal women, from rape, to prostitution and marriage.

The obscured, yet widely circulated term ‘Black Velvet’ operated linguistically as slang euphemism – an intended innocuous phrase that replaced an offensive social relation. It specifically masked the widely known, yet publically repressed, phenomenon of interracial cohabitation, as well as white men’s sexual aggression. From this survey of the comparatively blinding print exposure of Japanese men’s sexual unions with Aboriginal women and girls, ‘Black Velvet’ euphemised a register of touch that was racially specific not just to Aboriginal women but, as it transpires, to white men. As such for white men exclusively ‘Black Velvet’ denoted Aboriginal women as a collective, tactile surface of moral oblivion, devoid of the interiority of values, family attachment, responsibilities for custodianship or law, let alone sexual agency. The specifically white men either ‘interfering’ in, or forming enduring attachments to, black women’s bodies, instituted an epidermal economy that went largely euphemised. Yet this sexually transmitted colloquialism consummated colonial entitlement to the resources of the land. The right of extraction – a tenet of settler-colonialism – found ready application to the bodies of Indigenous women through such expressions. Its restricted use conveyed the ‘multi-national’ localities of northern-shore pearling communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and the Torres Strait, and the role of Indigenous women in creating ‘a place of conjunction or a site of convergence between different places, cultures, and nations’ that had to be suppressed under white Australia.

The halting, restricted use of ‘Black Velvet’ demonstrates that sexual and political dominance are indeed a ‘homology’ in Western Colonialism, replete with hidden truth claims. Yet it also reveals the role of language, its expressions and its suppressions, in adding to the porousness and incompleteness of colonial state power that Antoinette Burton has emphasised in her work, ‘due as much to the permeability of national/colonial borders as it was to the political instability of political regimes grounded in a normative heterosexual order’. In its racialised denotation it attempted to shore up the borders of ‘an unregulated “promiscuity” of categories [that] was occurring in the tropics’. Its very elision in the instance of Japanese and Aboriginal sexual unions attempted to map sexual and racial coordinates, through boastful colloquial classification, of territorially distinct, nationally discrete sexual domains linked to permissible trade and protected territory. The possessive impulse thus permeating its meaning, we can see, was flouted by Aboriginal women through the varied intimacies with which they engaged the Japanese pearl fishers into their economies and bodies. By the term ‘Black Velvet’ settlers alliterated their attempt to render Aboriginal women’s

112 Hokari 2003: 95.
114 Burton 1999: 2.
desires, their connections, their dealings, along with their victimisation, as surface effect. In their intimacies with the Japanese Aboriginal women resisted the touch of white men as any claim to possession.

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Awabakal voices: The life and work of Percy Haslam

John Maynard

The late Percy Haslam, a noted journalist and scholar of Newcastle, had a long, continued and significant association with Aboriginal peoples within the Newcastle and Hunter Valley regions. The language, culture and history of the Awabakal became his obsession and life’s work. Haslam died some 25 years ago and dozens of boxes of his papers and work were deposited with the archive section at the Auchmuty Library of the University of Newcastle. In 2001, with funding from an Australian Research Council (ARC) Indigenous Research Development Scheme Grant I set out to not only examine the works of Haslam but also reveal an understanding of the man behind the material. In saying that, I am not attempting a theoretical analysis of Haslam’s work here but rather I offer an introductory biographical overview of the man by those that knew him intimately in the hope of stimulating further questions for research. Who was he? Where did he come from? What drove his insatiable interest in Aboriginal culture in particular the Awabakal? Purist and professional academics do tend to denigrate amateur ethnographers – where does this situate Haslam, his work and legacy?

Aboriginal community directive was very much at the forefront of my undertaking this study. Much respected, Newcastle Aboriginal elder, the late Uncle Bob Smith asked at an opening address of a Cultural Education symposium held at the University of Newcastle in 1998, ‘Why doesn’t someone do something with the works of Percy Haslam? It is tragic to think that this man’s life work was wasted.’ Ray Kelly, the then Director of the Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-op Ltd, indicated his support. He said that Percy’s work in its raw and unedited state was of little use to the local community. If however, it was edited and produced in a comprehensive published state it could prove to be of invaluable assistance in aiding greater understanding and appreciation of local Aboriginal history and culture to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous advantage. I was fortunate as a young boy that I grew up knowing not just Percy Haslam but also his brothers Ben and Harold (Doc) Haslam. Ben and Doc in particular were constant and regular visitors to our family home. Later I recall sitting on a seat at Broadmeadow racecourse in my early twenties and studying the form-guide with Percy who was a keen punter. It was only later, that I sadly realised not just of opportunities lost, but also of the importance of Percy’s work. Today his memory and work is little remembered and this is the real tragedy. Percy Haslam was trying to leave a record and path for others to follow; hopefully his record can be restored to its rightful and deserved place.
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Percy Haslam takes notes at the Baime shelter at Broke near Newcastle.
Source: Courtesy of Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.

The Haslam Collection is housed at the University of Newcastle’s Archives, Rare Books & Special Collections Unit. The Haslam Collection itself is varied and diverse. It contains collections of Aboriginal tools, weapons and utensils, photographs, written studies of language, history, culture and personal reflections and memoirs across decades of work. In originally conducting work at the archives I acknowledge the assistance of both Gionni Di Gravio (who compiled a wonderful guide to the Haslam and other collections relating to Aboriginal History and Culture on the University of Newcastle Awaba website) and former archivist Denis Rowe. My archival work at the time was richly complemented by several key figures both Indigenous and non-Indigenous who knew Haslam well and consented to being interviewed.

Outside of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley both the man and his work remain virtually unknown. Some outsiders have suggested this may in part be due to Haslam himself, ‘who was mysterious and secretive about his work’.1 As a journalist and a backyard scholar Haslam had operated throughout most of

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his life completely outside and disconnected from the academic arena. There are unquestionably elements of the romanticised Aboriginal ‘Noble Savage’ embedded in Haslam’s work. He was a product of his time and was brought up on a staple diet of adventures in the wilds, through magazines and annuals like Boys Own, Lone-Hand, Gem and Magnet. Nevertheless his work and studies provides invaluable insight of the Awabakal people. From the latter part of the nineteenth century through to the 1960s a swath of professional and amateur anthropologists stampeded across the continent to study, dissect and analyse every conceivable Western viewpoint of Aboriginal cultural life – before the inevitable ‘dying race’ theory rung down the curtain on the last link on what was described as Stone-Age man. Martin Nakata in his groundbreaking study of the Haddon expedition in the Torres Strait has established a platform warning of the negative deficiencies in these studies yet recognising that they now provide a platform where Indigenous scholars can study, unpack and rework these materials to advantage from an Indigenous standpoint.

The Awabakal through the work and efforts of missionary Reverend LE Threlkeld are one of the few south-eastern Aboriginal groups to be closely documented in the nineteenth century in regard to language, history and culture. Haslam’s work in the twentieth century can be utilised to complement the much better-known earlier nineteenth century works of Threlkeld, and throw new light on the evolving institutions and perceptions of the local Aboriginal people of Newcastle and its surrounds. The final verdict on Haslam and his work remain like the man still something of a mystery and contradiction. As we are now aware the missionary Lancelot Threlkeld and therefore Biraban as his informant never used the word Awabakal or Awaba in any form to describe the local Aboriginal people or its language. It was John Fraser some 60 years later who acknowledged that he invented the terms when editing Threlkeld’s work for his publication An Australian language as spoken by the Awabakal, the people of Awaba or Lake Macquarie. In that context clearly Haslam was basing his knowledge on Fraser’s inventions and not the original works of Threlkeld. However, Haslam himself recorded that by the early decades of the twentieth century the remnants of the traditional people had also begun referring to themselves as the Awabakal, which continues to this day.

Haslam’s insight as a journalist and his concern for historical truth and objectivity were central to his working ethic. He himself attested that

As an experienced journalist, I was trained in the tradition that valid reporting, as is required of a journalist to inform the public by his written word, is “recording history on the wing.” This does not mean that in the rush, which is so much part of daily newspaper, life should force the journalist to ignore the need to challenge and check. History, as much as

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possible, must be what the writer believes to be the truth, stated simply
and without distortion – the latter fault can easily stem from slovenly
attitudes or inexperience; and of course, lack of knowledge.\textsuperscript{4}

Percy Haslam was born in Newcastle, the son of Percy (Sen) and Clarice
Haslam. Percy (Sen) had been badly wounded in World War One and his
injuries impaired his working opportunities. Percy Haslam’s grandfather had
migrated from Britain in the 1840s, and his maternal grandfather Thomas
Denny came to Newcastle from Victoria. Thomas Denny began working with
the \textit{Newcastle Morning Herald} in the 1880s and served the newspaper for over
50 years. He established what was to become a long lasting family tradition
with the newspaper. Percy Haslam followed in his grandfather’s footsteps and
began work with the newspaper in 1933; he continued to work for the \textit{Herald} for
the next 44 years. A great uncle, Jos Hasslame (original spelling) was at Derri-
gaba (now Wickham an inner suburb of Newcastle) working at Farnham’s the
machinist shop in the 1830s. Jos Hasslame was forced to change his name to
avoid the attention of the authorities, since he had links back in England with the
Chartists, ‘the first independent working-class movement in the world’.\textsuperscript{5}

Percy Haslam’s other grandfather, Benjamin Haslam, came to Newcastle from
Victoria as a small boy in 1852. The Haslams had a long-standing association
with the railway. Benjamin Haslam was the second night officer appointed to
Newcastle Railway Station. He had joined the railway in about 1870 going on
to become the first station master appointed at Glen Innes and died there as a
young man. His upbringing and family background instilled in Percy Haslam a
very strong sense of family, work ethic and standing up for the underdog.

Percy Haslam’s association and interest with Aboriginal people, culture and
history stretches back to the first decades of the twentieth century. Haslam’s
uncle had an established friendship with Aboriginal people living in the bush.
Percy recalled visits to Lake Macquarie, Toronto and Belmont in about 1917
where his ‘first teachers were people of tribal tradition when he was about 8
years old’. People like Berntee, Gommera and Yee-oekealrah accompanied him
on bush trips south of Swansea, Cooranbong, Martinsville and Mandalong. He
was taught the language, and claimed to have been ‘put through’ Awabakal
ceremonies when he was about 12 years of age and given the name Pip-peeta
(little Hawk).\textsuperscript{6} He was the only member of the family to develop an insatiable
appetite for Aboriginal culture and history. The knowledge and bush hunting
skills Percy had learned from his Aboriginal teachers as a young boy proved
invaluable during the years of the Depression. He recounted he was able to
help his family, by supplementing their food supplies; ‘they were able to eat a
lot of duck’.\textsuperscript{7} Haslam acknowledged the gifts of ‘people who were so kind and
painstaking to teach … what they believed to be true from personal experience

\textsuperscript{4} Haslam Collection, Archives, Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle, see <http://libguides.
\textsuperscript{5} Briggs 1983: 198.
\textsuperscript{6} Haslam 1988: 11–14.
\textsuperscript{7} Haslam 1988: 11–14.
Haslam reflected that when he was about 13, the Aboriginal people he knew had seemingly disappeared overnight. They were forced to move because of commercial interests in their land; the Forestry Commission had begun moving into their areas to meet large timber orders from New Zealand and South Africa to make piles and railway sleepers.

Haslam had originally been encouraged to pursue studies to become a doctor: as his brother put it, ‘Perc had done 12 months medical’. In some respects he was favoured over the other family members, who look back with humour on those times. His mother would send his young brother Ben to the local shop and butcher to get ‘the best salmon and asparagus tips for Perc and I remember that he would make me take it back if it wasn’t up to scratch’. Despite these family sacrifices to support his studies, the combined pressure of the Depression and his father’s illness was too much for the family to bear. Against his family’s pleading, Haslam abandoned his dream and took work at the *Newcastle Morning Herald* to ease the financial strain. Haslam joined the Newcastle newspaper then largely owned by the local Wansey and Berkeley families in 1933, and his first articles appeared soon after.

Ben Haslam related an anecdote about his brother Percy’s career elevation and self-opinionated personality causing some tension within the family:

> The place we lived in at Wickham was no mansion. There were eight in the family and I remember one time we had an uncle in the back room staying. Mum was a bit volatile at the time and had an argument with Percy because he liked to be king of the castle. She grabbed his typewriter and threw it straight out the back door and it hit the uncle in the face as he was coming up the steps.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Haslam wrote a weekly column on friendly societies, featuring historical material. He had access to the early minute books and documents relating to Foresters, Druids and Oddfellows and so forth. He became official historian for the now defunct Newcastle Friendly Societies Association. Much of this historical material was re-published in lodge magazines. He was the only person to undertake friendly society research in the region. He still held the first minute book of the Court Hunter of the Ancient Order of Foresters (later absorbed by Manchester Unity Oddfellows). This was the first Ancient Order of Foresters lodge in the Newcastle district. He became the *Newcastle Herald*’s industrial and political roundsman and later became an associate editor. His political coverage included trips to New Zealand to cover the election of Michael Savage as the first New Zealand Labor Prime Minister in 1937 and also a visit to the United States during the 1940s.

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8 Haslam Collection, Archives, Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.
Ben Haslam felt at the time, Percy was ‘our star boarder or the one who was earning the most money. He modified short hand to suit himself and he was the only one who could read it. He used to have a lot of political contacts’. 12 Percy Haslam to put it mildly was a bit eccentric, he walked everywhere, never caught the public transport. His brother Ben said, during a conversation he would sit back in a chair, with his head back deep in thought with his eyes closed. He would often pass his family members on the street not having recognised them coming towards him.13

Wickham was a tough neighbourhood during Percy’s young life and his brother Ben stated that the ‘trouble for Perc was that he still remembered his roots and he might have got offside with a lot of people on the classier side’.14 The Haslam’s moved to Hamilton another Newcastle suburb just before the outbreak of World War Two. This marked another Aboriginal connection for the family as the house backed onto the famous Tom Maguire boxing gymnasium and during those years it was home to the legendary ‘Fighting Sands’ brothers. Ben Haslam recalled ‘a cousin of ours hung around with Dave Sands and he would bring him into our place’.15 Percy now established as a top rank journalist had married and was the father of two young children. But he had to endure tragedy and hardship, his wife, a sister at a local hospital died in her early thirties ‘of a brain tumour and he was left to raise a very young girl and boy, and mum helped him’.16

Throughout his working life his interest in Aboriginal culture and history never waned, and he read and travelled widely throughout the district in search of stories and mementoes. He was very well known and respected throughout the area particularly through his political columns. In about 1960 he was approached by the late Mr DR Blakemore then President of the Lake Macquarie Historical Society. Blakemore wanted Haslam to assist him in a research project concerning the Awabakal, supposedly using the linguistic writings of missionary Reverend LE Threlkeld as its base. Mr Blakemore was the first principal of Booragul High School and he was a scholar in languages. It was their intention to combine the language research with a significant cultural and historical study. They began by interviewing old residents aged 90 to 100, particularly in the Swansea, Martinsville and Cooranbong areas. Swansea was chosen because there was a rich field to exploit locally. Historians had overlooked the fact that the last pocket of tribal Awabakal people, though partly absorbed in urban life to some extent, had lived on there. Haslam and Blakemore spoke to elderly people who as children either spoke Awabakal or heard it spoken. They ascertained also that from the 1870s to 1880s white people freely spoke Awabakal as well, in Swansea, Pelican, and possibly Belmont South. The pair spent years checking and rechecking the language and traditional stories and other information handed down from generation to generation.

Blakemore died suddenly in the early 1970s, but Percy Haslam continued on with the project in a dual capacity. For the next 17 years of his life Percy Haslam continued his personal quest in search of knowledge of the local Awabakal people. His emergence as a scholar in his own right in the mid 1970s coincided with the resurgence of a vibrant, proactive Newcastle Aboriginal community. In the wake of the 1967 Referendum and the inspirational Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972 Aboriginal people were fuelled with hope and pride in the future, and demands for Self Determination and Land Rights became the vocal catch cries. Newcastle had always been a viable alternative to the oppressive paternalistic government policies of the past including segregation on reserves. The heavy industries based in Newcastle ignored racism and anyone walking through the gate at BHP with his or her hand up got a job.\textsuperscript{17} The impact of the 1972 Aboriginal family voluntary resettlement scheme saw hundreds of Aboriginal people move to urban centres like Newcastle, ‘reaching out for a better future for their children’.\textsuperscript{18} Aboriginal people took this opportunity with relish and many important Aboriginal community organisations based in Newcastle were a direct result of this exciting period.

It was in this environment that Percy Haslam rose to prominence amongst the vibrant politically charged and changing Aboriginal community of Newcastle. The Newcastle Awabakal Co-op was one of the major achievements of the time period. It was established to provide empowerment to the Aboriginal communities of the Hunter through the delivery of health and social services. John Heath recalls

\begin{quote}
I got involved with what was then the beginning of the Awabakal Co-op and I became a member of the Board of Directors and the Treasurer of that organisation. We were fighting for government funds at that time… Because of his interest in Koori things particularly language he (Percy) came into meet some of the local community.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

John Heath, one of the Co-op’s founding members, recalled that Victoria Mathews, the Co-op secretary, pulled him aside and said ‘this old whitefella came in and he speaks the lingo and wants to meet some more of the mob’.\textsuperscript{20} John Heath then arranged to meet him and reflected that ‘when talking with other people Perc had his own way of expressing himself and some people might think it was pompous. He was very proud of the fact that he had some understanding of the Awabakal language’.\textsuperscript{21} John Heath confessed he was no linguist but arranged for some Gumbayngir elders who were speakers of their language to meet Haslam. They stated that they were impressed and assured with the

\textsuperscript{17} Maynard 2001: 258.
\textsuperscript{18} McLeod 1982: 1.
\textsuperscript{19} Interview with John Heath, Newcastle, 24 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
\textsuperscript{20} Interview with John Heath, Newcastle, 24 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
\textsuperscript{21} Interview with John Heath, Newcastle, 24 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
way that he could speak the language, his pronunciation and diction and so forth. So I accepted that... So for me he was a genuine kind of article... He did have a lot of knowledge that a lot of people didn’t have. To talk with him about those things and try and change his point of view was a real challenge. He could be really stubborn at times.  

Haslam became actively involved with the Awabakal Co-op and over the course of ten years he worked with a lot of people including ‘Tommy Sales from the Darkinjung people on the Central Coast and Kenny McBryde who was a Bundjalung man who lived at Toronto, Jimmy Wright was also involved and a young Ray Kelly did some work at that time’.  

On his retirement from the Newcastle Morning Herald in 1977 Haslam was elected as Convocation Research Fellow at the University of Newcastle to study the local Awabakal language and culture. Haslam with some humility reflected on his move to academic life. 

I present myself as a recorder of history based on a lifetime of old time traditions of journalism, heavily affected by “grass roots” attitudes. I can quite appreciate my position intruding, as it were, into the hallowed halls of academia. I shall remain ever grateful to the “Newcastle Herald” and convocation of Newcastle University for the unique experience of being the convocation’s first visiting scholar, to be attached to the English Department for six months, to continue and complete my research into Aboriginal history of the Hunter region and some coastal areas... 

I felt somewhat timid at first (but can this really be true of a journalist who worked so long in a place like Newcastle with its own special rugged political and industrial rules), but the warmth and help of academics from the Vice-chancellor (Dr Don George) downwards, removed any sense of inferiority, real or imagined, to become absorbed into that atmosphere peculiar to a university campus.  

Emeritus Professor John Ramsland the former Dean of the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle felt that during this period ‘he was the University’s most eminent scholar’.  

Dr Bernie Curran recalls Percy Haslam’s arrival: 

he came into the Classics Department because he was working on Threlkeld’s grammar. I was just fascinated by the language and culture which Perc was trying to retrieve. He became very much involved with 2NUR... and tapes were made of his programs I know that for sure.  

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24 Haslam Collection, Archives, Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.  
26 Interview with Dr Bernie Curran, Newcastle, 26 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
In 1981 Haslam left Newcastle for a brief visit to the United Kingdom primarily to research manuscripts relating to primary settlement in the Hunter Valley and Port Stephens. He visited Cambridge University with the late Emeritus Professor Godfrey Tanner, at the time the Dean of the Faculty of Arts, at the University of Newcastle, and a Fellow of St John’s College, Cambridge who introduced him at Cambridge. Haslam and Godfrey Tanner formed a very close friendship:

Well I was interested to meet Percy Haslam when he wanted to come to see me about the fact of his great concern with the Awabakal language. I of course had studied when in Cambridge Sanskrit under Sir Harold Bailey as well as the Latin and Greek domain of my degree. Percy a retired journalist had worked for years understanding this language of the Awabakal because as a boy he had met a few of the surviving speakers and he got to know them quite well and they became family friends as it were and he was able to understand a lot about pronunciation and the relationship of the language.

Haslam also visited archives at the London Museum and the Congregation World Church Council because of the records held there of early missionary efforts in New South Wales. He was particularly interested in discovering new material relating to Reverend LE Threlkeld and the mission he had established at Lake Macquarie.

I took Percy in to see what records we had in Cambridge…We had a very good time in the Missionary Society in London they showed us all the papers on the matter…he found out a great deal about the position confronting Threlkeld...

At the time Percy Haslam said ‘Threlkeld is now emerging as a very important person in primary history on Aborigines in colonial times. His work on language and culture in our region are as good as any ever recorded, having regard for the times in which he lived and limited facilities available to record history’. Aside from Threlkeld, Haslam was also interested in republishing the diary of Isabella Parry wife of famous Arctic explorer William Edward Parry. Parry was for a time in charge of the Australian Agricultural Company at Port Stephens and his wife kept a diary complete with illustrations. Unfortunately Haslam and Godfrey Tanner were unable on that visit to meet with Ann Parry the great great granddaughter of Lady Parry. But Godfrey Tanner later met with her and had lunch at his London club. Parry at the time was the librarian at the House of Commons and had written the book Parry of the Arctic. She expressed that she was very happy to give permission for Percy Haslam to reproduce her great great grandmother’s diaries and illustrations. However, unfortunately, these diaries have never been published.

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29 Haslam Collection, Archives, Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.
On Haslam’s return to Australia the Institute of Aboriginal Development,\(^{30}\) with headquarters in the Northern Territory invited Percy Haslam to join a steering committee to form the first Aboriginal Languages Association and to address a workshop at Alice Springs.

Percy of course was also very determined not just merely seeing Aboriginal artists getting a vogue which some of them very much deserved but he wanted to show that the traditional tribal art was of a very high artistic value and also encapsulated the culture.\(^{31}\)

Clearly Haslam’s profile within the region was on the rise with increasing recognition of his work and demands on his time and input. During this time he was appointed official historian for the Central Aboriginal Sites Committee covering the area from the Hawkesbury to the upper Hunter and Taree. Haslam had a great love and understanding of the bush environs of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley. He lamented the damage modern society inflicted upon the natural habitat of the food hunt – the waterways, bush and mountain… what a contrast with the immediate environs! Ever so much presence there of European culture: cultivated farmlands, habitations of brick and mortar, and tar-sealed roads. And of course the pollution that flows from so many sources of machine operations: noise and contaminated air.\(^{32}\)

Haslam over the years had gained great knowledge of the Hunter Valley and Watagan Mountains in relation to Aboriginal sites of significance. As John Heath explained:

He made full use of the fact that he was a non-Indigenous person and made acquaintances with a lot of property owners and that was also of benefit. In the late 1970s there was a genuine concern among the non-Indigenous community with our cries for land rights. There was a worry that a blackfella was going to come up and claim the farm. So a lot of white people did not openly acknowledge these sites… Perc was often a conduit with the non-Indigenous community. We took him into our confidence… and we worked alongside him to gain some of that knowledge.\(^{33}\)

\(^{30}\) The Institute for Aboriginal Development Incorporated (IAD) was established by the Uniting Church in 1969 to assist community development for Aboriginal people and provide cross-cultural education between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society.

\(^{31}\) Interview with Professor Godfrey Tanner, Newcastle, 25 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.

\(^{32}\) Haslam 1978b: 2.

Haslam and friend, Browns waterfall, Watagans near Newcastle.

Source: Courtesy of Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.
The Aboriginal community became actively involved in opposing mining and land development that threatened Aboriginal sites of significance and they pushed for Aboriginal involvement with environmental impact studies. Haslam’s political contacts and knowledge also proved invaluable ‘Perc had a close relationship with one of the ministers at the time and we used that to put pressure on the departments’. Stopping a proposed dam ‘was one of the really big wins for us at the time. Percy spent time in the field with us and the team comprised Uncle Bert Marr, Zac Martin and Uncle Guboo Ted Thomas from the South Coast. So there were some terrific times’.34 The camaraderie and close connections of this group manifest clearly in one very funny incident recalled by John Heath:

Uncle Zac was from Cherbourg. He was a tricky bugger and liked to take a charge [have a drink]. Perc took a bottle of whisky up to the camp in case someone got bitten by a snake… It didn’t take long for Uncle Zac to figure out the bottle was there. Old Percy was a tricky fella too, so he had the bottle lying on its side up on a makeshift cupboard they had set up in the tent. He had tried to hide the bottle so Zac wouldn’t know it was there. He didn’t want to be digging it out each day to check to see it was still full, so he had the neck of the bottle poking out from behind some things so that he could see that there was liquid in it… It didn’t take uncle Zac long to get into it. Zac was changing the angle of the bottle each day slightly as he was reducing it. Finally when old Percy realised the bottle was on a ninety-degree angle to that he originally placed it. Percy said ‘Zac must have been bitten on the lips by a snake’.35

One of Haslam’s colleagues from the University, Dr Bernie Curran, mused on his significant impact in drawing attention to the importance of the local Aboriginal culture and language.

Where did he develop this fascination with the Aboriginal thing? Why did it become such a cause? He was one of the earliest ones to really take on that flag, in that context where there was a certain amount of skepticism about how much you could really find out, and how much knowledge you could actually gain. I think his biggest contribution was he unearthed so much through his interviews, and through his desire to keep it alive. He added a lot of colour. Perc became our kind of Guru if you like of Aboriginal culture.36

John Heath also recognised the significance of Haslam’s foresight about maintaining Aboriginal culture: ‘He really did have a strong desire to see what he saw as Indigenous culture preserved and maintained as a living rather than museum species’.37 Haslam in many instances was a man well ahead of his time especially in the recognition of Aboriginal history and the political rights

36 Interview with Dr Bernie Curran, Newcastle, 26 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
37 Interview with Dr Bernie Curran, Newcastle, 26 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
of Aboriginal Australia. Writing on the impact of European invasion in New South Wales he sadly reflected that in a ‘relatively quick time many coastal tribes in NSW suffered extinction (one wonders whether the term “extermination” would be more appropriate’.

He also challenged the prevailing view about the role of Aboriginal women in traditional society stating ‘there had been too much denigration of Aboriginal women; so much was their history distorted that most Europeans had for generations gained a false view of how important a part Aboriginal women played within their own society’.

He was instrumental and a driving force behind an Awabakal language revitalisation project, which began at Gateshead High School in 1986. The University of Newcastle supported the project, which sought to restore the Awabakal mother tongue to persons of Aboriginal descent residing in the Hunter.

We set the seeds of an Awabakal language program. Because Perc was white and an older person he wasn’t a good teacher in the sense for the young kids so I became a teacher alongside him. My involvement was to learn the lesson the week before the kids. So together we started an elementary language program. At least we were preserving aspects of the language. We often had fifteen or twenty people mainly kids but we had older people as well.

A link to this project was a weekly program of language lessons conducted by Haslam on radio station 2NUR called ‘Awabakal Voices’. Haslam said: ‘It would be wonderful if by 1988 we could return to Aborigines something European society took away from them, this was a vital facet of their identity, their mother tongue’.

Clearly Haslam’s record and standing during these years was extremely high within the Newcastle area. He was a vocal campaigner on the importance of cultural knowledge still held within Aboriginal communities and that whilst ‘due consideration must be given to what had already been recorded, notwithstanding some areas of conflict, grass roots research involving people still able to recall some of the vital history and culture of a tribe had an urgent priority’.

He certainly practised what he preached:

He wrote a lot of the mythology especially around Lake Macquarie when he was writer in residence. What he did to resurrect the knowledge of Threlkeld. Threlkeld got absolutely minimal interest from people. So that was the most important thing he did. He made us aware... He wanted to bring the culture alive. He was trying to give memory to certain geographical features and show you the stories.

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38 Haslam Collection, Archives, Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.
39 Haslam 1984: 11–12.
41 Haslam Collection, Archives, Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.
43 Interview with Dr Bernie Curran, Newcastle, 26 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
Indigenous academic Deirdre Heitmeyer a longtime employee at Wollotuka Institute at the University of Newcastle reflected:

I only ever saw him as someone who knew a lot about the local Aboriginal area. I found him to be so knowledgeable about the concrete things... He was a great speaker and very charismatic. He educated a lot of non-Indigenous people, and Newcastle with its so-called tolerance, well a lot more tolerance than a hell of a lot of other places and Percy had a lot to do with that by being different.\textsuperscript{44}

Haslam took his language and cultural teaching programs to Aboriginal inmates at Cessnock gaol. One Aboriginal man at Cessnock related that it gave him a sense of pride and understanding he had not had before, ‘the things I am learning here will mean that I won’t be back’.\textsuperscript{45} As a result of the project at Cessnock he was approached by the Aborigines Prisoners Progressive Committee at Long Bay to visit them and conduct monthly visits to conduct Aboriginal history, language and cultural lectures. ‘I remember his work in the gaols as well, he did a hell of a lot of work with the prisoners out there he was tireless in that’.\textsuperscript{46} Sadly Percy Haslam died suddenly on 17 September 1987 aged 75 and remains as a great loss to the local Aboriginal and wider Newcastle community. Deirdre Heitmeyer went to a meeting where Percy was due to talk at Maitland on the evening of his death. When she walked in ‘everyone had tears in their eyes, everybody felt the amount of loss at that time, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. What I remember most, that sense of “oh my god” all that knowledge is gone’.\textsuperscript{47}

Heitmeyer’s sense of loss was compounded by the fact that straight after Haslam’s sudden death, his unfinished manuscript on Lady Parry’s journal, as well as his recordings and radio programs went missing. It appeared that a large slice of Haslam’s work had simply disappeared. As late as 2000, Haslam’s brother ‘Doc’, still worried about what had happened to his research:

Why didn’t they let someone who knew the value of the stuff go through it? Some bloody Sheila was supposed to have taken a lot of the stuff. I don’t know who that was. She was printing a book he had started.\textsuperscript{48}

The Haslam Collection at the University of Newcastle does not contain these missing manuscripts or recordings. However, a recent conversation with his daughter Janis has solved the mystery of the manuscripts. Shortly after Haslam’s death in 1987, an unidentified man had gained access to Percy’s flat before the family had gone there, and removed some items. However, Haslam’s son, Ian confronted the individual and took the items back, where he has kept them in a safe, out of the public domain, ever since. Sadly, the greatest tragedy is that

\textsuperscript{44} Interview with Deirdre Heitmeyer, Newcastle, 22 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
\textsuperscript{45} Haslam Collection, Archives, Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle.
\textsuperscript{46} Interview with Deirdre Heitmeyer, Newcastle, 22 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
\textsuperscript{47} Interview with Deirdre Heitmeyer, Newcastle, 22 July 2001, John Maynard personal collection.
\textsuperscript{48} Interview with Harold ‘Doc’ Haslam, Newcastle, 27 November 2000, John Maynard personal collection.
Haslam’s work, the product of his obsession and passion for revitalising and maintaining local Aboriginal history, language and culture, has not been widely disseminated, and thus not left the mark it deserved.

In conclusion, the often missed significance of amateur historians/ethnographers like Haslam, who have developed passionate and longstanding connections with local Aboriginal communities, often long before academic historians did, and created important archives not only used by other scholars, is that they also, and more importantly, provide Aboriginal communities with a rich resource that assists their directives of language revival and maintaining cultural and historical knowledge. This article highlights the need for such figures to be recognised, for in doing so historians can also recognise the agency of local Aboriginal communities who engaged with figures like Haslam in their formative years, offering their knowledge and friendship, and instilling a life-long interest in Aboriginal culture and language. Figures like Haslam, can in turn also be seen as important conduits of this knowledge, for he was then able to pass on all he had learned to later Aboriginal generations.

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The Aboriginal people in Sydney as seen by Eugène Delessert, December 1844 to August 1845

Colin Dyer

Eugène Delessert was born in Le Havre, a sea-port in northern France, in 1819. He was thus only 25 years of age when he arrived in Sydney in late December 1844.

His journal of this voyage, under the full title *Voyages dans les deux océans Atlantique et Pacifique, 1844 à 1847, Brésil, Etats-Unis, Cap de Bonne-Espérance, Nouvelle-Hollande, Nouvelle-Zélande, Taïti, Philippines, Chine, Java, Indes Orientales, Egypte* (326 pp), was published in Paris by A Franck, Libraire, 69 rue Richelieu, in 1848. On page 51 of this volume he says, when crossing the Equator on 19 October 1844, that he was ‘recrossing this for the fifth time’. He was thus already a well-seasoned traveller, although this was his first visit to Australia.

In August 1844 he had set out from Le Havre for Australia and, on this occasion, would be away for some three years before returning home.

His journey to Australia began with a short stay in London before setting sail in *The Persian* from Portsmouth, on England’s south coast, on 17 September. After travelling via the Cape of Good Hope, *The Persian* arrived off the north coast of Tasmania on 20 December but, due to unfavourable winds, was forced to sail around the island before arriving safe and sound in Sydney Harbour on 27 December. The journey from Portsmouth had thus been accomplished in just three months and ten days.

In the Introduction to his journal Delessert declares that he was ‘always careful to keep an exact record’ of events during his travels and, in the section presented here, says that ‘among all my compatriots who have written about New-Holland, none has stayed here as long as I have’, and, he continues, ‘I dare to say, what I write about them [ie the New-Hollanders] is without exaggeration or prejudice’. Joseph Fowles, in his *Sydney in 1848*, published shortly after Delessert’s visit, echoed these sentiments. Delessert, he declared, was ‘one of the foreign gentlemen to visit the Colony who may be fairly considered to have written without prejudice or bias’, and had ‘enjoyed the best opportunities of becoming acquainted with the state of society amongst us’.1

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Six years after leaving Australia (in 1851) Delessert was in California where he was a member of San Francisco’s Vigilance Committee, formed by bankers and other leading citizens to combat the rampant lawlessness reigning there. He was indeed listed in San Francisco’s 1852–3 city directory as a resident banker with Delessert, Cordier and Company. Later in the 1950s he returned to reside in France, and then in Algeria where he died at Médéa in 1877.

Delessert stayed in Sydney for nearly eight months (departing on 15 August 1845), and it is the part of his journal describing the Aboriginal people (pages 127 to 151 of his original French) that is translated.

Translation of Delessert’s text, pp 127-151

In certain tribes, the men are in the habit of covering their forehead with a white or red bandage. This custom – which is especially difficult to explain for those with short hair – is no doubt linked to some superstitious idea. They usually grow their hair very long, and often knot it on top of their head. Indeed, they have no other hairstyle. Pierced ears complete the portrait of the Aborigines of Australia, whose colour is less black than the negroes [nègres] of Africa…

Women’s clothing consists of a simple kangaroo skin, which they call ‘wo-r-wan’. When approaching town, or when the weather is bad, they drape a sort of mantle over their bodies, which comes down to their knees. A sack hanging from their shoulder, which is called a ‘kin nun’, serves as a recipient for the food they pick along the way. Those who have a child sometimes add to this accoutrement a short of plait to cover it and protect it from the cold. They wear no ornament but, exceptionally, the girls intertwine some flowers in their frizzy hair. They too have their ‘coquetterie’, and one could say they use make-up; but what make-up! A piece of wood charcoal reduced to powder, and with which they crudely smear their forehead and cheeks!

The men and women also rub their bodies with a sort of red earth mixed with grease, which makes them give off the most unpleasant smell. They use this process in order to maintain the ‘cleanliness’ of the body and to protect themselves from the effects of the rain and the sun. As a sign of mourning, the men paint across their forehead a band of white colour which goes down as far as their cheekbones. For the women, this white band is replaced by broad patches of the same colour. If it is a relation they have lost, their grief is manifested by deep incisions which they make on their bodies and which they leave wide open. I have seen old women whose blood ran along their temples as a consequence of this kind and made in the same circumstances.

2 Delessert thus uses both the terms ‘Australia’ (‘Australie’ in the French) and ‘Nouvelle-Hollande’. In his *The Life of Matthew Flinders*, Ernest Scott observes that ‘the nineteenth century was well within its second quarter before the name New Holland gave place ... to the more convenient and euphonious designation: Australia’, Scott 1914: 1.
It is not a sign of war that the natives here paint their bodies, as in other parts of New South Wales. They reserve this kind of ornament for their dance meetings. There they can be seen striped with red or white bands which go from their neck down to their feet. To these they add transversal lines which they trace on their chest and tummy, which gives them a quite diabolical appearance. They tattoo themselves, but in a rather crude manner. This operation, such as they see it, consists of making deep cuts, mainly on the chest and shoulders, and then maintaining there a prominent scar. The resulting impressions are considered both as marks of personal distinction and as a means of recognition of each tribe.

Although the horrible custom which makes these natives cannibals has been abolished around inhabited areas, it is probable that this still exists among the natives in the interior. I remember an elderly native whom I once questioned on this subject, an extremely gentle man who had nothing ferocious about him, telling me he had eaten human flesh when a child; he also added that he could make up his mind to begin again today. It is true that he lived near Sydney, where he had become just a bit civilised. The traveller Cunningham was one day at the farm of one of his friends, forty miles from Sydney, when one of the tribes from Argyle stopped there. It had just been fighting tribes from Bathurst which had erupted onto its territory. Cunningham asked one of the warriors how many people he had killed, and the man raised five fingers thus designating the number he had slain. A woman was among these, and the warrior showed him a few left-over bits of her which he promised himself he would devour as he had done the rest. It is curious to note that this barbaric custom only exists among people who have no elected or hereditary chief, or who recognise no other superiority than that of force and individual bravery.

The natives live entirely in the woods, but they build no hut of any kind there. A make-shift shelter suffices. With a few branches stuck in the ground up against a tree or rock, they make a kind of arbour where they have just enough room to squat.

In the rainy season they cover it with bark, and place stones on this fragile roof so the wind will not carry it away. They usually take care to choose the most sheltered spots for these crude huts, and set them up in situations opposed to the prevailing winds. They maintain fires day and night of which, they say, the smoke drives away the mosquitoes.

When they travel or make only short distances from their camp, they take a stick burning at one end in order to make a fire whenever needed. They all carry one in winter, under their kangaroo skins [sous leur peau de kanguroo], to help keep the cold out. This stick too, according to their beliefs, should protect them against the spirit of darkness of which they have great fear.

One can easily see in the woods the spot where the negroes [nègres] have slept because of their custom of burning two small fires between which they sleep with confidence, protected, as they believe, by the demon of the night, which they call ‘Potoyan’.
The nomadic life of the Aborigines [aborigènes] of New-Holland is probably one of the causes of the stupidity of their nature. It is perhaps also why they do not seek to make utensils they could not take with the light baggage required by their frequent passage from one place to another. Mr Cunningham contrasts these savage peoples [ces peuplades sauvages] with the New-Zealanders who, for their part, are obliged to set up a fixed residence amongst their yams, their sweet potatoes and the animals they raise, because the woods do not provide enough game for their food. They decorate their huts with sculptured dishes and other objects which they prepare in their leisure time, and which they are happy to show.

Perpetual wars, the destruction of children etc. are obstacles to population growth. Necessity never requires them to come together and to provide for their needs by artificial means, like most natives in the southern islands of Polynesia. The Australians who live under roofs [sous les toits] are generally those who inhabit certain parts of the coast, where shellfish and fish assure their food supplies for a large part of the year.

Amongst a people who are not very industrious, and who easily do without objects which seem the most necessary to life, one must not expect to find weapons very remarkable for their elegance or ornamentation. Consequently the weapons of the New-Holland natives cannot bear comparison with those masterpieces of patience that one sees in the hands of the Aborigines of New-Zealand, Fiji, Tahiti, etc. It is not without trouble and sacrifice that I managed to obtain most of the weapons in use among the savages [sauvages] of the interior of New-Holland; they do not wish to part with them either for money or in exchange for anything.

As soon as I had obtained one of these weapons, I sought to discover its name and use. The plate that I have had engraved gives an exact idea of the shape of these various weapons. It will be easily understood that, not being made according to a model as in Europe, each one of these weapons presents differences which depend upon the whim of he who makes it, upon the nature of the wood at his disposal, and upon the shape of the accessories he uses.

The lance, called the ‘mo-ting’, is usually employed for fishing. At one end it has four prongs whose extremities are fitted with sharpened kangaroo bones. These prongs may be brought closer together or further apart by using the little cross-pieces fixed against the cord, which ties the prongs to the lance. The lance itself is about eight feet long. At the other end there is an indentation into which fits the hook on a stick called the ‘wom-mur-rur’, which helps to throw the ‘mo-ting’. I have often witnessed the skill with which they harpoon fish several feet under water and which I could hardly see.

The ‘ta-win’ is a club made of very hard wood, about a foot and a half long. On each side, large pieces of sharp silex are fixed which create a double edge (and
The Aborigines have two kinds of shields or ‘koreils’. One is narrow, thick and triangular, and just over two feet long, and they use it very skilfully by whirling it around. The other is oval-shaped, and protects the carrier against blows from lances or javelins. These shields are usually carefully sculpted, and daubed with red and white colours.

The most remarkable weapon by far is the boomerang [boomereng], called ‘tur-ra-ma’ by the Aborigines.

It is a projectile made of a piece of very hard wood, about two feet two inches long and slightly curved. It weighs about 9 to 9½ ounces. One side is slightly convex and clad with inlaid ornamentation, while the other is flat and smooth. When ready to be thrown the boomerang is held horizontally and, as a rotation movement is imparted to it when thrown, the air presents so much resistance to the flat side and so little to the convex and cutting edge while it cleaves through
the air, that on its long journey it does not seem to submit to the usual effects of gravitation. This weapon, so simple and strange, would pose complicated problems to learned people who would like to explain why, when thrown to the right, it comes back at two or three hundred paces to the left; and why, after having been thrown out of sight and as far as gunshot, it comes back after cleaving the air for several minutes [sic] to fall at the feet of him who threw it.

The use of the boomerang requires lengthy practice. I have often tried, but have never managed to throw it further than any ordinary stick. The Aborigines do the most surprising things with it. If they wish to kill an enemy two or three hundred paces away they successively throw one or two boomerangs, one to the right and the other to the left, and the unfortunate fellow who is their target rarely escapes this terrible projectile. If the first weapon misses him, the second inevitably hits him. One can only dodge these by using great skill, and a very special shield.

There are two kinds of boomerang. One is less long and more curved, and comes back to the thrower’s feet. The other does not come back, but travels further. In his book on New South Wales, Major Mitchell says one can achieve incredible feats with this weapon, as for example, sending it over the top of a tree to hit something behind it...3 When cast amidst a flock of wild ducks it creates the most frightful carnage, and it is used mainly for this ... It can skim just above the ground or rise to great heights, according to the wish of the thrower.

With the first lance I have described the Aborigines skilfully spear fish which they seek for food, and which they often eat raw straight from the water. The end of the ‘wom-mur-rur’, which is flat and slightly sharpened, is used for digging up various roots, as well as the larvae of ants’ nests, of which they are very fond. They also eat every sort of lizard and snake, even those which are known to be the most poisonous. They take care, however, to gut them and cut off their heads. Although snakes are very numerous in New-Holland, I have only encountered but one during my eight-month stay in Sydney and yet I made long and frequent excursions in the woods. When that snake appeared before me, I killed it with a rifle shot, and was preparing to mutilate it more but the native accompanying me cried ‘Tan-to-a! Tan-to-a! Yano-a wwa yi-kora!’ (Stop! Stop! Don’t do that!) So he took it and, after cutting its head off to be sure it was dead, he used it like a cravat while waiting to eat it for supper. Just like hungry dogs, the natives feed themselves, when hunger presses them, on everything which comes to hand, so it is not rare to see them in the streets searching amidst the rubbish and grabbing pieces of raw meat already in a state of putrefaction.

Major Mitchell tells how one evening, after setting up camp where he and his companions were peacefully asleep, he was attacked by the Indigenous people [les indigènes] who wanted to get hold of their baggage. When these people had been repelled, the travellers picked up, the next morning, a bag (kin-nun) that

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3 Delessert is referring to Major Mitchell’s *Three Expeditions into the Interior of Eastern Australia ...*, Mitchell 1839, vol II: 348–349.
an individual in his flight had left behind a tree, in which they found a sample of the daily food of these savages [sauvages]: three snakes (mot-tos), three water-rats (pur-ra-moi-ban), about two pounds of small fish (bir-ra-ba), a quantity of roots, etc. The same bag even contained a few cutting stones (puk-kor) and two hatchets (ma-go) like the one I have described above.4

It is curious to see an Aborigine pursue a possum (wil-lai) when this animal has taken refuge in the hollow of a tree. As soon as the hunter has recognised, on the tree-trunk indicated to him by his dog, the marks of the possum’s claws, he climbs up it by means of a rather ingenious method consisting of making on the wood, as he goes up, notches or cuts with an axe. Each cut, quite deep, helps him successively to place his big toe, and to cling on until the top of the tree. While the hunter is making a cut, his whole body thus remains supported by his big toe. These men, moreover, make use of their feet with as much dexterity as their hands, and it is with their feet that they pull out of the water a species of shellfish (unio) which they eat.

If they surreptitiously sneak something it is almost always with their feet, and they take advantage of their thick hair to hide in it quite often the object they have stolen. With their feet they also throw dust and even stones at their enemies.

As a consequence of this habit, contracted since their youth, to climb trees, their big toes – on which all the weight of their bodies is borne in this exercise – acquire over time an extraordinary strength. It is a frightening spectacle to see them, when they climb to the top of a tree, holding on with just one hand, cut with an axe with the other, and arrive at heights of more than a hundred feet on very large and straight trees with smooth bark. As their song says it so well:

‘Morruda yerraba tundy kin arra
Morruda yerraba min yin guiny wite mala.’

(On the tracks the white man walks with shoes which crunch, but he cannot climb trees, nor make use of his fingers.)

When the hunter arrives near the cavity in which he supposes the possum has taken refuge, he plunges a long stick into it, and thus makes sure the animal is there. If he cannot catch it with his hand, he then makes an opening just below the hole containing the possum, probes again to force it to hide its head in it by hitting it strongly several times against the trunk of the tree.

The natives of New-Holland have senses which are as fine and developed as those of the dog. The slightest noise alerts their attention, and they can follow the trace of a man’s footsteps on all kinds of terrain, so long as they are fairly recent and the ground has not been made wet by rain. They can also work out very precisely how long it is since the individual went by, and can even tell if the footprint is that of a black or a white man. The police use these natives to seek our Bushs-rangers [sic] (convicts on the run), and rarely fail to find them.

4 Mitchell 1839, vol II: 270.
The dark colour of their skin enables them to keep out of sight more easily than a white man, and thus they have greater facility for killing a kangaroo, which they call ‘mo-a-ne’. With great skill they can find parrots’ nests, whose eggs they eat. As for these birds’ little ones, they raise them to sell them in the towns and this, it seems, is the only industry in which they indulge. It often happens that an Aborigine will cover twenty leagues (about eighty kilometres) to sell a parakeet for some feeble sum of money, soon dissipated on drink and hard liquor. They employ a rather curious trick to hunt the New-Holland emu or cassowary.

This bird, whose shape reminds one of the ostrich, is very shy, and runs with great speed. In order not to frighten it, hunters take care to cover their bodies with branches and, concealed by their shields (equally covered with foliage), they get up close enough to the emu to be able to throw a long javelin at it. For hunting they usually use a lance made of light wood and ending in a stick made with a species of very hard cane. They sometimes use the stalks of the Xanthorrhoea.

When they wish to prepare the flesh of the kangaroo for food, they begin by digging a fairly deep hole in the ground, and light a big fire in it. They then throw in a quantity of stones, and leave them there until they are very hot. Then they empty the hole, clean it, and place there – without even skinning it – the kangaroo which they intend to roast and which they cover with heated stones. This operation suffices for they do not wait until it is well cooked before eating this animal.

Some of their superstitious ideas are related to the individual’s food. According to them, each age group and gender must have its own type of food. Thus, after eleven or twelve years of age, the girls no longer eat a kind of animal they call ‘bandicouts’ [sic], these dishes being capable of harming their approaching fecundity; and, should the boys ever eat black eagle, they would never see their faces adorned with a beautiful beard. It is only after thirty that one can use kangaroo flesh, and before that age they do not wish to taste emu because then, they say, their skin would cover with pimples.

It often happens, in certain parts of New South Wales, that water sources dry up and, as a result of hot weather or a long drought, water is completely lacking. How then we must pity the Aborigines who, when all the little streams are dry, are obliged to cover several leagues haphazardly without knowing which way to go, in order to quench their devouring thirst!

The circumstance adds to the difficulties of an expedition to the interior. Major Mitchell and Dr [sic] Cunningham were forced more than once, during their excursions, to go without water for several days. One often hears settlers say that they can only obtain water by travelling distances from four to five miles away. The Sydney newspapers in August 1847 announce that Dr Leichardt [sic], the intrepid traveller who discovered the overland route between Botany Bay and Port Essington, has failed in his new enterprise to cross New-Holland from east to west at its widest part, and that it is lack of water which forced him to
retrace his footsteps after a month of travel, to the great disappointment of the whole colony, where all minds are preoccupied by the idea of colonising the interior of the country.\(^5\)

I have sometimes suffered myself from this lack of water, which hunting made even more tiresome during a whole day in the great heat. Not finding the smallest stream, I was obliged to make do with the muddy liquid lingering in the ditches under deep shady places.

This water shortage was so bad in 1827, where for six months not a drop of rain fell, that the police seized the inhabitants’ wells and water-tanks in order to regulate water rations distributed daily. Nowadays, as a consequence of measures taken by the administration, and which required long-term works, water arrives in Sydney from different places.\(^6\) In the countryside, some farmers dig wide dams or reservoirs to collect the rainwater, which they take care to clarify with a filter.

The Aborigines seem to have no idea of religion and, to my knowledge, no-one has anywhere found anything resembling an idol. On the other hand, they are not foreign to all kinds of superstitions. Thus they believe in the influence of dreams, in charms and magic spells, and they attribute almost all their illness or misfortunes to bad spirits to which they give different names. They believe that those who die go to another country, are there transformed into white men, and come back later to live in their land. This doctrine, however little developed it may be (and which reminds one of metempsychosis), is engraved so deeply in their imagination that, every time they think they see a sort of resemblance between a white man and one of their deceased friends, they are absolutely convinced of the identity of the two people.

Some of their most singular customs, and I will even say the most barbaric, could scarcely be interpreted other than as sacrifices they intend to offer to their bad spirits. When a young man, for example, arrives at the age of puberty, it is necessary according to them, in order that he becomes completely a man, that he allows the second incisor tooth from the left side of the upper jaw to be extracted. In other parts of Australia, this operation is only complete when two teeth have been removed instead of one.

A few days before the ceremony, the victim withdraws to the interior of the woods, where he imposes upon himself a sort of starvation diet, and avoids showing himself in front of any human being. After a few more or less bizarre preparations, they proceed to sacrifice the tooth. This is not positively pulled out, but a man, whom they call ‘Coradj’ or ‘Karakul’, knocks it out with a wooden

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\(^5\) Friedrich Leichhardt’s expedition reached Port Essington in December 1845 after completing an overland journey of some 3,000 miles. His attempt to cross Australia from east to west failed when he was forced, after covering only 500 miles, to return in June 1847. He disappeared, while making a second attempt, in April 1848.

\(^6\) Delessert is doubtless thinking of Bushy’s bore, a project to convey water in cast-iron pipes ‘from the large lagoon near the old paper mill, south of the South Head-road to a reservoir to be formed in Hyde Park’. This was begun in September 1827 and not completed until June 1837.
awl which he applies to the tooth and a stone used as a hammer. All this is done with three sharp measured blows. Henceforth the young man, designated until then under the name of ‘ko-ro-mun’, becomes a ‘Yiraba’. The ceremony is called ‘Kua-lung’, or rather ‘Kumun-billi-kotira’, which means literally ‘to take out the tooth’. Once a young man has undergone this ordeal, he has the right to take a wife, to arm himself with a lance and a shield, and to participate in his tribe’s combats. He then no longer needs to fear an encounter with ‘Put-ti-kan’, which is how they name the evil spirit which kills all those who have not undergone the tooth operation.

It is rather difficult to explain another extraordinary custom, which consists of cutting off the women’s little finger of the left hand, or more exactly its two last phalanges. Some travellers, trying to find a reason for this, had thought at first that certain women acquired a particular right [un droit particulier] by this means; but it was noticed that married women and girls had been thus mutilated, which makes this explanation very doubtful. Others imagined that the women were able, by means of this amputation, to wind their fishing-lines more easily around their hand – a supposition which, in my opinion, does not give a better reason for this strange custom.

When one of their people has been killed, the tribe to which he belonged gets together immediately and swears, in the presence of the dead body, to avenge his death; but it is all the same to them whether they kill the principal guilty person or another man of an opposing tribe. The law of ‘an eye for an eye’ is quite wide-spread among them, and even has a rather far-fetched interpretation. If, for example, a man perishes accidentally, either by falling from a tree or perhaps by diving into the sea or from any other means, his friends impute his death to some evil spell from an enemy tribe… When an individual is seriously unwell and fears succumbing to his illness, he finds no other way to escape the danger threatening him than to put to death, if he can, just anyone.

I have already spoken about the sentiment which brings them after the death of a relative (and to testify to their deep affliction) to injure themselves with cutting instruments, and even with burns strong enough to hinder their ability to walk. The cause of this custom is unknown, unless it be their belief in demons. I have often asked some of them why they had allowed themselves to be mutilated, to have their teeth removed, to be burnt, tattooed, etc. They replied simply: ‘My father did it, my grandfather too, and my children will as well, I hope.’

Polygamy is generally admitted among these people, each man being able to possess a certain number of women of any age. There exists another rather singular custom among them, whereby a man is allowed to court a woman while her husband is still alive, provided the two spouses give their consent, and with the proviso that the ‘sigisbée’ shall marry the woman after her husband’s death. The latter then receives some gifts as well as his female companion. When a

7 Une femme means both ‘a wife’ and ‘a woman’.
8 In Italian a cicisbeo is the more or less recognised gallant of a married woman.
man dies, custom has it that his women withdraw into their fathers’ tribe during the mourning period. There, they live almost disdained by those very people to whom they should belong, and would incur an exemplary punishment if they went back to them straight away.

When a woman gives birth to twins, one of them is put to death and, if they are of different gender, it is the male who is then sacrificed. The reason these savages [ces sauvages] fall into such barbarity is that a woman cannot have enough milk to feed two children at once, and she also would not be able to seek enough food for them and herself at the same time. Mothers suckle their children until they are four or five years old but, well before weaning, they already teach them how to procure part of their food.

As it is customary among the Australians [Australiens] to take their wives from foreign tribes, he who wishes to have a companion – or, rather, a slave – sets out secretly at night with a few of his comrades and, club or ‘waddy’ in hand, they all throw themselves upon the parents of the girl, whom they surprise in the midst of their sleep. For his part, the lover grabs her who has been the object of his preferences and takes her off with him to his tribe, not without having first overwhelmed her with blows and bad treatment, and almost always unconscious.

This last trait, which is difficult to believe since nothing explains it, is reported by a few travellers, among whom George Barrington in his Voyage to New South Wales. ‘As soon as one of these natives [naturels]’, he says, ‘has caught and abducted the woman he has chosen and whom he goes to seek in an enemy tribe, he knocks her over, hits her with a club on the head, the back, etc. and, seizing her by one of her arms, he drags her, streaming with blood, through the woods, over rocks and mountains with all the violence and determination of a savage [barbare] till he finally reaches his companions. The tribe to which the woman belonged usually seeks revenge for this outrage by the law of “an eye for an eye” [la loi du talion], but the wife holds no grudge and rarely abandons her husband and her new tribe.’

The fact of these nocturnal abductions has been confirmed to me by a native who had attended, in his youth, one of these expeditions.

The women in this country are not better treated than beasts of burden, and their life is but a series of misery and slavery. One sees them, carrying their children on their shoulders and hips, laden additionally with a heavy bag containing provisions and fishing instruments. They cross woods and marshes, and are often obliged to scramble up the sand-dunes beside their master, who is free from all the burden and has only the trouble of carrying his light weapons in his

9 This is in fact from George Barrington’s 1802 The History of New South Wales (Barrington 1802: 35). In 1802 Pierre Milius (with Baudin’s expedition) had written: ‘A very polite way of courting a lady [une dame] in New Holland is to bash her with a club ... Such a treatment makes the women very faithful to their husbands.’ Milius 1987: 48.
hands. It is also the women who go in search of food, plunging at times into the depths of the rivers to pull out shellfish which they cook under hot coals, and at others pursuing possums to the top of the highest trees.

In our countries, where civilisation has shown itself justly generous towards women, these latter, young and beautiful, hasten to enjoy the power which the years will come only too soon to weaken. In Australia, to the contrary, fatal wrinkles and even decrepitude become titles to the empire that women exert over their compatriots. In fact, they make up half the important assembly (aréopage) which, in each tribe, deliberates upon public matters and punishes misdeeds indicated to them. This assembly is extremely jealous of its attributions, and carefully maintains all the most superstitious traditions and customs.

Even during war-time the most intrepid chiefs bow their head before these elderly matrons, and receive from their hand, without a murmur, blows from a club, hoping that such an abject attitude will conciliate their favour and good will, and thus ensure they will smoke their skin [sic] if they should perish in the fray.

Among the Australian peoples who live furthest from the sea and the rivers, and thus suffer more often from food shortages, the women are called upon to fulfil yet another function. When famine devastates the land it is they who point out the victims who, sacrificed to the bad spirit, must be put to death during their sleep and serve as food for their famished companions. These horrible sacrifices appear to be in use in almost all the islands of Polynesia.

The old men also have some personal prerogatives. Emus’ eggs, their flesh and that of the kangaroo are exclusively reserved for them, and young people do not touch these delicate dishes. It is the old men too who, in war-time, give the orders and the signal to throw boomerangs or other such weapons.

The dances in which they indulge have retained, for the most part, a quite savage energy and vivacity. They usually take place in the light of burning torches and to the sound of a sort of tambourine made with a possum skin or bladder, stretched over a wooden hoop. The chants which accompany this have a remarkable cadence, at times slow and soft, and at others strong and animated, having some resemblance to the humming of a bee and the howls of numerous animals.

The figures of their dances are very varied, but above all they have a very bizarre form of entertainment, of which I can give here only a very imperfect idea. Two of the most skilful participants (and recognised as such by the assembly) open the dance which, at first gentle and moderate, gradually takes on a more lively character, the other actors joining in successively to play their part. After a while, only one individual is left behind, and it is then that a general ballet begins in which everyone, following a certain rhythm, gives himself up to the most uncoordinated contortions and movements. Legs do the splits, heads quickly turn right and left, eyes burn bright, hands brandish all kinds of weapons, thus
simulating the hunting and slaughter of certain animals. Then, at the moment when this exercise has arrived at its highest point of animation, everything becomes immobile and stops as if by enchantment.

The sight of all these naked men, with their bodies marked by a certain number of white and red stripes, produces in this light the strangest effect. The substance used to paint these ornaments, which the savages have the art of varying in such a way that not one looks like another, is fabricated by the natives themselves. It is a kind of earth they call ‘ko-pur-ra’ which they soak with water and which they mix, after cooking it, with kangaroo grease.

The dance I have just described, called the ‘corrobory’ [sic], seems to produce an extraordinary excitement on those who execute it. However indifferent or relaxed one of these savages may be, or even half asleep, should he decide to dance a ‘corrobory’ [sic] he immediately experiences its influences and develops, as this goes on, a supernatural energy and vigour. His muscles swell and stiffen, his ardour knows no limits. However, once this is finished, he regains his usual bearing and falls again into that state of inertia and laziness from which the dance managed to drag him for but an instant. I have seen some of them devote themselves for several hours to these horribly tiring games, and I could not understand how they could tolerate the fatigue for so long.

Une famille de naturels.
A camp is rarely composed of more than six to eight huts, housing twenty to twenty-five individuals, men, women and children, always followed by a large number of dogs of all kinds. These animals, reduced to seeking their own food, are extremely skinny and covered in disgusting pustules [lèpres] which they can transmit to the individuals with whom they live. Their offspring are looked after by the women, who do not disdain on occasion to suckle them themselves. These dogs, who take up the best spots in the huts and are willingly used as pillows by the blacks [noirs], are gifted with the finest sense of smell which far surpasses that of our European dogs. They thus render great service to their masters by the speed with which they discover the track of certain animals.

The natives ordinarily light a fire in front of each hut. During the day they often eat together, semi-recumbent, and spend their time chatting or listening to the superstitious precepts of one of their companions versed in these matters, a sort of priest whom they call ‘coradji’.

It would seem straightforward to us that individuals belonging, if not to the same family at least to the same tribe, would take pleasure in sharing their provisions and taking their food together. But it is quite otherwise among these populations, who often experience difficulty in procuring food, and where the fear of lacking it makes them egoistic and quick to take offence. As a consequence, the men are very jealous of their foodstuffs, which they eat in secret. However, should they be in the presence of others, they usually offer them a small portion.

Major Mitchell, whom I had the occasion to see in Sydney, has published the story of his exploration into the interior of Australia. His work presents very interesting details of his relations with the natives, who were then still unfamiliar with white people. They manifested great fear when seeing sheep, and the presence of a horse frightened them enough that they dared not attack the strangers. Beware, he, however, who should wander alone among these savage peoples [ces peuplades sauvages]! Looking upon the whites as veritable sorcerers, able to tame ferocious animals and carrying thunder about with them (for our weapons of war had the effect of thunder upon them), the Indigenous people [les indigènes] would have killed them just to make sure they were susceptible of dying. All this happened in 1836. Today a European could travel five hundred leagues in the interior without fear of being attacked by the Indigenous peoples, for they bear no ill-will towards the whites who know how to take them with gentleness. Unfortunately, from time to time disturbances occur in the interior which cause the death of some individuals, generally when sheep (which the natives no longer fear) are being stolen, and of which they are guilty.

One can understand that men, reduced to such an abject situation and forced to obtain food by every means possible, experience temptation at the sight of a large flock of sheep, and the desire gets hold of them to seize a few of these animals.

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10 Delessert is referring to Mitchell’s ‘Expedition to the Rivers Darling and Murray’ in Mitchell 1839, vol II.
But this is often punished by a rifle shot, for the whites put no store on the life of these miserable beings [ces êtres misérables]. I am far from approving such brutality towards creatures who, after all, are men. I also do not approve of the whites needlessly killing kangaroos when they come upon them, just for their skins, when they know very well that these animals, unique to New-Holland, form a major part of the Aborigines’ food [la nourriture des aborigènes]. A native said on this subject some years ago: ‘Wite [sic] fellow come come, kangaroo all gone’.11

The new laws are excessively severe in this regard, and punish by death the white person [le blanc] who has intentionally killed a black person [un noir].

One could have thought that the Indigenous people belonging to the tribes of New South Wales, driven one day by cupidity and need, would spread out in great numbers among the towns and habitations in order to thieve and beg. Nothing, till now, has happened to justify this prediction. It is rare to meet in Sydney more than twenty or thirty Aborigines at one time, unless this is at the beginning of the year when the government distributes blankets to them. On occasions too, when they want to make long journeys along the coast, they come aboard the steam-boats, where they are given free passage.

One traveller has depicted these men as tenacious and even insolent beggars, but I have never met a single black man who answers this description. They are not in the habit of annoying anyone, unless people seem to take pleasure in ogling

11 In English in the original text.
them, which sometimes happens. How, indeed, can one prevent oneself from staring with curiosity at these men, clad in the most grotesque of costumes, be it a suit without trousers, a waistcoat without a shirt, or simply a pair of underpants. Sometimes just a kangaroo skin will serve the purpose! Soon, noticing the attention being given to them, they take advantage of it to ask for a few pence which they use to buy tobacco, and their request is always accompanied by grand salutations. They are generally quite well received in the shops, which they rarely leave without being given a little something. If they need a fish-hook, for example, they go to a hardware store, and they often obtain the object they desire as a gift. Other shop-keepers do not refuse them a little tobacco, or a glass of brandy or common rum. Charitable families put aside for them left-overs from dinner, and put them up in some part of their house. These men, it should be said, do not lack a sense of gratitude. They seek quite willingly to be of service to the people who have helped them. In this way they will help the servants chop wood, or look after fetching water.

If they are sent fishing they faithfully bring back their entire catch to those whom they regard as their masters. There are few examples of them misappropriating the slightest thing belonging to their house of adoption. On occasion people are not afraid to entrust them with rifles, and they set out to hunt game, without even having the idea of fleeing with these weapons which, for them, would be a fortune. The Aborigines of the interior, still completely savage [sauvages], have however a strong inclination for theft, if we believe the travellers who have observed them.

The natives who live around Sydney are half civilised, and speak English quite well. Their language is all the more difficult to learn because it is not at all generalised, each tribe having its own dialect which differs so much from others that tribes, situated only ten leagues from one another, cannot understand each other or communicate. As a consequence, one finds few whites who can say a few words or make themselves understood by the Indigenous people. There does exist, however, a grammar book of the language of the natives of Hunter’s River [sic] and the Macquarie River, written by Mr Threlkeld, which I have looked at. I have thus got to know and memorised several words and phrases of this language, which have been useful to use on a few occasions.12

The young sportsmen of Sydney seek out the strongest and handsomest men whom they employ to beat the undergrowth when they go hunting. These men are of great help to them for they know better than the whites where game is most plentiful.

The English have perhaps still not done everything they should to elevate this barbaric race [cette race barbare] of Aborigines of New South Wales. They persist in allowing them to wander almost naked about the streets of the towns, when

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12 The Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld had published An Australian Grammar comprehending the principles and natural rules of the language as spoken by the Aborigines in the vicinity of Hunter River, Lake Macquarie etc., NSW (1834).
it would be easy to require them to dress, at least every time they come into places inhabited by Europeans. One could believe they would quickly conform to this requirement if it were imposed upon them.\(^{13}\) Doubtless, the charm which these people (who are not alien to the enjoyments of life and society) find in a wandering vagabond life will always present some obstacle to civilising them. Perhaps, however, more could be done than has been attempted till now. Schools had been established for the natives, where they could learn to read and write, which they did as quickly and as well as the whites. These schools have been closed, and I do not know what caused this. A project has just been adopted by the Legislative Chamber aiming to improve the lot of these men, who cannot be repelled forever, and of whom it is not impossible to soften the ways of life and to master the savage instincts [les instincts sauvages].

References


\(^{13}\) In his *Souvenirs d’un aveugle*, Jacques Arago (with Louis de Freycinet’s expedition) had already suggested that ‘it would be wise and moral to deny entry to Sidney [sic] to those natives [naturels] who present themselves without clothes’, Arago 1839, tome IV: 104. However, the question did not seem so pressing to the British authorities. In 1816 Governor Macquarie had banned ‘any black native or body of natives’ from entering Sydney with weapons, but had made no mention of the need for clothes; Ellis 1958: 356.


Late on Thursday afternoon, 18 April 2013, Uncle Tom Trevorrow the Ngarrindjeri elder who worked tirelessly to create a just and equitable future for his community, and in the process brought countless black and white people together over more than a quarter of a century, sat down to continue working in the office of his beloved Camp Coorong, near Meningie, South Australia. He had just completed an interview for an international documentary on endangered languages with Ernie Dingo. Moments later this remarkable statesman suffered a heart attack just two weeks before his 59th birthday. His sudden passing left his family, many friends and the Aboriginal community across Australia, and internationally, bereft and in deep shock. For many it was, and still is, difficult to imagine a world without Tom.

He was a visionary, and an inspirational leader and teacher who dedicated his life to achieving recognition of Aboriginal rights and to improving the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

His funeral in Meningie on 2 May 2013 attracted over 1,000 mourners. People spilled out of the small Meningie Uniting Church, the adjoining hall and the specially erected marquee; lining the Princes Highway. Both the South Australian Premier and the Leader of the Opposition attended, and one of two eulogies was delivered by the Premier Jay Weatherill. Those outside witnessed a large mass formation of ngori, pelicans –Tom’s ngatji (totem) – soar directly over the church, flying in from across Lake Albert, at the moment the service began. Then just as the service finished the pelicans flew back again, some two hours later.

Tom was a quiet and humble man who worked from his home-base on Ngarrindjeri country. His family was paramount in his life and in spite of his considerable abilities and accomplishments he did not seek personal recognition or financial gain. With his loved and loving wife Aunty Ellen Trevorrow, the respected cultural weaver and educator, and his older brother George Trevorrow, he established Camp Coorong in 1985 through the Ngarrindjeri Lands and Progress Association as ‘a race relations and cultural education centre’. They were inspired by earlier Aboriginal political initiatives such as the Tent Embassy.¹

Camp Coorong has a strong educational and community focus and maintains an acclaimed Ngarrindjeri Cultural Heritage Museum. Many thousands of school children, university students, as well as international and local visitors have benefitted from Camp Coorong’s hospitality and unique pedagogy.\(^2\)

Through his knowledge, vision, persistence, and exceptional ability to connect with people from any walk of life, Tom achieved numerous ground-breaking results for Ngarrindjeri and other Aboriginal peoples. His work, alongside Elders such as George Trevorrow and Matt Rigney, instituted profound changes across areas of self-governance, cultural heritage management, cross-cultural education and caring for country that will resonate across the decades and centuries to come. *Kungan Ngarrindjeri Yunnan* (Hear Ngarrindjeri People Speak) Agreements established with state and regional levels of government have fundamentally changed the dynamic of Ngarrindjeri-government interactions and provided innovative models for workable treaties.\(^3\)

Before his death, Tom was working with the South Australian government on the legal implementation of the Letters Patent, 1836, and other founding documents that encoded hitherto ignored rights for Aboriginal people and their descendants to freely occupy their land and waters.\(^4\) He saw this as key to resolving the unfinished business that impacted Ngarrindjeri futures. This may prove one of his greatest legacies.

**Growing up on-Country in the Meningie Coorong fringe camps**

Tom Trevorrow was born in 1954 in Meningie, on the south-east side of Lake Albert, the son of Thora Trevorrow (nee Lampard) and Joseph Trevorrow. On his mother’s side Tom traced his lineage to the esteemed Elder of the south-east ‘Queen’ Ethel (Ethel Whympie Watson), and on his father’s side to the Ngarrindjeri woman Alice Walker and her Cornish-born husband Jim Trevorrow, an example of one of the many successful cross-cultural marriages from the colonial era. Alice and Jim raised a large family of 13 children at their home at Salt Creek. On Alice’s death in 1941, a newspaper article titled ‘The Good Samaritan’ recalled her many acts of kindness towards travellers who found themselves stranded along the Coorong.\(^5\) Tom also had this way of helping people, and as Steve Hemming said in the second eulogy at Tom’s funeral, ‘his door was always open’.

During his early years Tom was raised at the One Mile and Three Mile Fringe Camps on Ngarrindjeri country, by his parents and Elders. ‘A camp’, Tom

\(^2\) See MacGill et al 2012.
\(^3\) See Ngarrindjeri Lands and Progress Association 2006; Trevorrow and Hemming 2006.
\(^4\) See Trevorrow et al 2010; Berg 2010; Reynolds 1996.
recalled, ‘was measured in the miles out of town and the closest we could live
to Meningie was one mile because Ngarrindjeri were not allowed to live in the
town, with the rest of society’.

In those days the government of the day was always trying to get us to
live on missions or reservations. But we didn’t want to, so we stayed
together in camps administered by Ngarrindjeri elders. We couldn’t live
on our traditional land anymore because it had been taken away from
us by the Europeans so they could make money from European farming
practices. They came in and they cleared the land and they put fences up
and it became private property, so Ngarrindjeri had no other choice but
to go and live in camps on unallocated land where there was still some
native vegetation left and kangaroos and emus, wombats, swan, duck,
geese, fish etc; our traditional food, and good fresh water.⁶

Tom received an outstanding Ngarrindjeri cultural education from the Old
People, who taught him Ngarrindjeri culture, stories, history, how to read and
look after Country and to live off the land. Educated in the western system to
part-way through sixth grade (because of the restrictions of government policy
and restrictions placed on the movements of Aboriginal families), he grew to
become a powerful speaker, a passionate advocate for justice, and an influential
thinker. Tom possessed a deep understanding of Ngarrindjeri history, country,
culture and the way all things are connected. His intellectual framework
illumined the thinking of many scholars from fields as diverse as anthropology,
hydrology, history, archaeology, linguistics, gender studies, law, education and
environmental science – among them Diane Bell, Deane Fergie, Steve Hemming,
David Paton, Daryle Rigney, Christopher Wilson, Kelly Wiltshire and myself.
When grappling with the tangled borders of Ngarrindjeri and settler history for
my doctoral research, Tom always steered me gently in the right direction, free
of judgement.⁷ As our children grew together our families formed a strong bond
of friendship, as happened with so many of us who researched and received
hospitality in Ngarrindjeri country.

Premier Weatherill recalled his admiration and respect for Tom whom he
‘counted as a friend’, noting Tom had taught him much about leadership; how
leadership was not about shouting above everyone, but about bringing people
with you. ‘When Tom spoke’, he observed, ‘people listened. Tom always talked
about challenging moral issues with integrity and clarity.’⁸ Words to Tom were
valuable and weighted: never wasted, always to target truth. Tom’s words
brought people together across improbable divides. His wife Ellen said ‘it was
the ancestors who gave him his voice’.⁹ He was equally at home speaking at
Harvard University as speaking to primary school students or among groups of
disengaged youth.

⁶ Trevorrow in Marsh 2013.
⁸ Weatherill 2013.
⁹ Eulogy written by the Trevorrow family, delivered by Steve Hemming, Meningie Church, 2 May
2013.
In addition to his other roles Tom was Chairperson of the Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee, and following the death of his brother George and his Ngarrindjeri brother Matt Rigney, of the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority. He lent his unflinching support to Ngarrindjeri women Elders in their long and arduous struggle with developers and the state to protect places on Kumarangk (Hindmarsh Island). This fight eventually saw the women vindicated by the 2001 von Doussa Federal Court judgement, and much later in 2010, by an official apology from the South Australian government. Tom fought hard for the repatriation and cultural reburial of the stolen remains of Ngarrindjeri Old People held in Australian and overseas museums and scientific collections. He made an important contribution to the negotiations for the co-management of the Coorong National Park, and as Ngarrindjeri spokesperson to the Murray Darling Basin Commission his voice was important in formulating the Murray Darling Basin plan. Tom remembered ‘the Coorong black with ducks and brimming with fish, the river flowing with clear water’: ‘the river flowing’, he emphasised, ‘keeps Ngarrindjeri country alive’.

The devastating impact of the unlawful removal of his younger brother Bruce Trevorrow from their family by the state in 1957 weighed heavily on Tom. He stood by Bruce during his ten year battle for compensation which resulted in a landmark victory: to date Australia’s first and only successful stolen generation court-claim. Sadly Bruce died only months later. In his findings Justice Gray contrasted ‘Bruce’s impaired ability to cope with the problems of life’ resulting from his removal, to ‘the resilient lives’ enjoyed by Tom and the other siblings raised by their parents in the fringe camps and later in towns throughout Ngarrindjeri country.

Unfinished business: The man in black

Ah, I’d love to wear a rainbow every day,
And tell the world that everything’s OK,
But I’ll try to carry off a little darkness on my back,
Till things are brighter, I’m the Man In Black.

In the clear late afternoon just before sunset the sound of Johnny Cash singing Man in Black rang out over the Meningie cemetery while Tom’s family, and his friends, placed handfuls of Coorong-sand, tea-tree twigs and gum-leaves into his final resting place.

Tom was buried wearing black, the colour he always dressed in as a mark of respect for the past, for the ancestors, and the unfinished business that needed to be addressed. He left the world having laid solid groundwork for a brighter

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11 For a more detailed account see Bell 2008; Hughes and Trevorrow 2014; Anthony 2010.
12 Cash 1971.
future. As Steve Hemming said in the family’s eulogy, ‘Tom can rest comfortably knowing that he has left really important building blocks for the Ngarrindjeri nation in times to come.’

Tom is survived by his wife Ellen, children Thomas, Frank (deceased), Bruce, Tanya, Joe, Luke and Hank, 16 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. After long days of meetings and negotiations he could always be found sitting on the verandah with Ellen, their children and their grannies (grandchildren) as the sun set over the Coorong. His partnership with Ellen (that began when they were aged 12 and 11), and their large family was at the core of Tom’s life and work and his fight for justice.

Aunty Ellen Trevorrow passionately continues Tom’s educational, cultural and political work, as well as her own weaving practice, at Camp Coorong assisted by their family. She is about to travel to Europe for a Ngarrindjeri study-tour of French museums, and to visit the Cornish town in England where Tom’s grandfather Jim Trevorrow was born, re-connecting with this branch of the Trevorrow family.

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Book Reviews

Which Justice and Which Politics?


Rethinking Social Justice is a significant book not because its arguments always convince but because it can promote constructive debate. Three proposals are central to the work. The first one is that, since the 1950s, the Australian discourse regarding Indigenous issues has been structured by two ideas of social justice embodied in the notion of ‘a people’ and ‘a population’. The latter term refers to an aggregate of individuals; the former to a nation or ethnic group though Rowse proposes to understand ‘a people’ not so much in cultural terms but more in terms of a political and institutional project. At first glance the book may appear to be a play on two aspects of justice pertaining on the one hand to self-determination and, on the other, to a range of capabilities that people require to be self-determining in the modern state. Yet this would be a mistake. The first hint comes in the book’s subtitle, From ‘Peoples’ to ‘Populations’. Rowse sees the former mode of social justice under attack and by the book’s end it is hard to see the latter mode, addressed to various disadvantages, as a part of justice at all. A communal, political course is privileged over capabilities and also over other dimensions of sociality that bear on both gendered and generational relations. Such a position may not be what Rowse intended but part of this review will address this bent in his argument.

The book has a second and related theme. Rowse argues that the terms in which an Australian Aboriginal people are defined should not be cultural ones – especially connoting a baseline of tradition or custom – but rather historical and political ones, calling on the manifold experience of an Aboriginal people in the Australian state. This people is a ‘collective’ and ‘lasting interlocutor of and within the nation’, and ‘of government’. This interlocutor has a ‘distinct identity, heritage, institutions and land base’ (pp. 5, 77). I for one could not but endorse Rowse’s proposal to understand an Aboriginal people as a historically evolving subject rather than one of essentialised tradition. Given Aboriginal people’s encapsulation in the state and its capitalist economy, this people’s identity cannot but be both political to a degree, and rendered through experience. Yet Rowse does not explore much the richness or complexity of this subject. He elaborates on just one dimension of an Aboriginal people: that people as manifest in an Indigenous sector of Aboriginal corporations. Moreover, although this sector is ‘embedded in the apparatuses of Australian government’ (p. 126), he sees it still as the collective, and singular, voice of self-determination.

A third proposal is that quantitative data concerning disadvantage can be used to undermine self-determination. These data are ostensibly transparent and quickly
understood. Nonetheless, they are also subject to political uses. Qualitative data can seem less transparent and more difficult to grasp. Yet they are significant. These different types of data bear on the standing of the Indigenous sector. Self-determination is a long-term project involving the salience of Aboriginal experience and the tenor of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Qualitative gains that this project brings do not always register in ways that lend themselves to measurement. Therefore health, education and employment ‘gaps’, measurable in some form, also can be used to mask other types of incremental achievement among Indigenous organisations. A focus on the Aboriginal population can subvert, both intentionally and unintentionally, the project of a people’s voice. Rowse is warning here that an Indigenous sector undermined could leave Aboriginal people as isolated advocates for their interests; their rights as a first people obscured or washed away. This view has great merit but also needs careful scrutiny.

These three themes are pursued more or less intently through a variety of chapters that reflect some of Rowse’s passions: one is the biography of Australian liberal intellectuals of various hues. Six chapters in the book discuss particular figures: Paul Hasluck, Theodore Strehlow, Helen Hughes, Noel Pearson, Peter Sutton and especially HC ‘Nugget’ Coombs. Another of Rowse’s passions is public administration and, in particular, that of remote Aboriginal communities. A third is the social movement for Indigenous self-determination, for the self-governance of a people. Rowse’s earlier writing on this issue came in the context of the Mabo decision and in his work on Coombs. In this book, the agency identified with land rights and native title is extended to an Indigenous sector and its organising role, especially in remote communities. A further four chapters elaborate in one way or another Rowse’s concern with the people/population distinction and the concomitant issue of qualitative versus quantitative data. Rowse’s discussion of the initial South Australian land rights legislation, the New South Wales Stolen Generations and the Australian Reconciliation Barometer are all interesting. One chapter concerns the Indigenous sector mainly as reported on by consultant anthropologists. Rowse’s references to self-determination preponderate in this chapter.

Here I focus on just two issues among a number of notable ones. The first concerns self-determination and the Indigenous sector. The second concerns the issue of qualitative and quantitative data. As one dimension of self-determination, land rights and native title are unique. Both have been intertwined with the impacts of mining and the fight by Aboriginal people for a voice concerning their land. Both have carried the capacity to distribute widely a specific Indigenous resource – land and the engagement with it that reflects customary sovereignty. Albeit in very limited ways, this status is acknowledged now in non-Indigenous law. Land councils have been a central institutional and organisational expression of these rights, providing a political voice in state and territory politics. At their best these councils reflect both centrifugal and centripetal dynamics, empowering

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1 The latter involved a nationwide survey on responses to Reconciliation.
individuals and small groups as well as regional peoples. Moreover many have an income stream, including royalties, which derive from corporate mining agreements. These features make at least some land councils less susceptible than some other Indigenous ‘corporates’ to governmental routinisation.

Still Rowse argues rightly that an emphasis on ‘custom’ in these corporations can become a ‘traditionalist straitjacket’ (p. 27). Aboriginal people now desire not only land rights but also forms of appropriate development that rest on a monetised economy, and service provisions that rest on public administration. One reason why small groups register under an Aboriginal corporations act is to be a legally-defined recipient of an enterprise grant – for an art co-operative on country, a mustering project, or a rehabilitation centre. As these projects wax and wane, Indigenous corporations come and go. Yet these small proliferating corporations are not Rowse’s focus. He is more concerned with the larger organisations that deliver services to communities and outstation groups. Often these involve a community or shire council with its organisational links to one or more health clinics, school boards or, if it still exists, an outstation centre. Together these different types of corporation seem to match both the centrifugal and the centripetal thrust of land council institutions. Yet, it is difficult to find an equivalent as such. Most of these other types of corporation are heavily dependent on government funds. Moreover, the relation between the large service organisations, often controlled by a particular group, and small enterprise ones is unclear. The nature and locus of one collective voice is more difficult to discern.

Periodically, the resource concentration in large councils can create cultural strains as kin groups compete for control. The issue may not be services as such but rather the paid employment, transport, telecommunications and the like that are attached to an administrative hub. Rowse notes correctly that the Indigenous sector’s major challenge comes not from these local strains but rather from policy change in government. Yet this challenge comes not simply in the guise of neoliberal ‘reforms’. The fact that governments of any ilk remain a very major source of funds for Aboriginal communities makes them vulnerable. Moreover, these resources often come as transfers rather than as capital earnings. Lack of employment opportunity and capital, especially in remote Australia, mean that communities remain largely resource clients of the state. The explosion of corporations that Rowse and others note is in part a reflection of the administrative dynamic involved in defining legal individuals for governments to deal with. This development has an upside. It reflects Aboriginal people engaging the state and organising at a local level. It also has a downside reflected in extensive reliance on public funds. Inevitably, governments have the upper hand and local initiatives are far too exposed to shifts in the political mood of non-Indigenous Australians.

Patrick Sullivan observes that effective public administration for remote Aboriginal communities is likely to come only with integration at regional levels rather than at state or national ones. (His implication may be that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission model was misconceived or at least
overly ambitious.) In Sullivan’s view, community administration will be done in an able and stable way mainly by Indigenous people committed to a particular locale. He suggests that this newly conceived Indigenous sector is in fact the basis for an Aboriginal civil society. Rowse sees more. He portrays employees in these corporations as a ‘new class’ of Aboriginal people in the ‘tutelary regime’ of the ‘state’. Moreover, this emerging class can become the collective voice of self-determination (pp. 105, 107, 126, 127).

This view of the Indigenous sector suggests at least three caveats. Firstly, without a greater range of resource sources, including earnings from the private and public sectors and private philanthropy, marked reliance on government remains. Is this truly self-determination? Second, without the capacity-building that this resource diversification entails, an incipient class dynamic must gather pace in remote communities – even in the absence of local labour markets. This dynamic will be propelled by the undoubted power of the state to persuade public servants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to its frame of reference. Third, and notwithstanding the acknowledged ‘tutelary’ nature of the state, Rowse seems to assume that economic development can and should occur only beneath the carapace of community governance. Numerous examples of small business enterprise past and present in rural and remote communities make this an unhelpful stance. It acts to constrict thinking about the types of capability that remote Aboriginal people need today.

For example, Rowse cites as a resounding success a community resource centre, Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation (BAC). Yet in November 2012, BAC was placed in administration due to the incompetence of a non-Indigenous CEO. The latter had replaced a previous non-Indigenous CEO of longstanding. The rapid fall from grace, in just three years, suggests a management board that lacked the enterprise experience, the knowledge and perhaps the confidence to check a rogue CEO (pp. 112–113). In an apparently similar context, I have seen a corporation in central Australia reduced to a shadow of its former self. Faced with increasing impersonalism and generational change, traditional owners lacked the relevant capabilities to safeguard their centre from ‘fly-by-night’, incompetent whites. By contrast, a recent report on the top 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporations cites as its case study in success an organisation in the Pilbara. Fortunate enough to be able to diversify across both public and private sector sites, its Aboriginal owner-staff are well paid and amply equipped to maintain their enterprise – founded over 40 years ago.

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3 Note also that Rowse barely mentions the role of electoral politics and the influence of Aboriginal public intellectuals in his account of self-determination.
4 In this regard it is important to keep in mind that many Indigenous public servants are recruited from outside the rural and remote communities in which they work.
5 See, for example, Keen 2010.
6 For a description of Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation see Altman 2005.
7 See also Dingle 2012.
8 Office of the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations 2012.
Rowse’s focus on an Indigenous sector privileges politics over economics with some cost to the coherence of his argument. It seems that, in the case of economy, culture is a permanent obstruction whereas this is not the case for governance (pp. 173–174). There is no systematic account of the local and regional economies that Aboriginal people might engage now, or in the future with more capabilities and sources of capital. Ultimately, self-determination needs a rethink that involves both governance and development, the latter addressed in diverse and experimental ways but not simply as a highly vulnerable cost on government. This is possible without a mere capitulation to the mining industry or other like conglomerates. The rethink is required especially for those communities neither involved in mining’s milieu nor so small and remote that the carapace of government seems inevitable. Some of these at least can be a site for new forms of self-determination.9

Let me turn now to a second issue concerning the use of quantitative data on disadvantage. Rowse argues that constant reference to ‘the gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people represents the former not as different or resilient but as the embodiment of mere lack. Inevitably, this undermines the standing of a people and thereby the Indigenous sector. Rowse also observes that questions in the Reconciliation Barometer invoke ‘Indigenous disadvantage’ in ways that suggest a ‘not so likeable’ feature of Aboriginal people: ‘their widely attributed failure to take responsibility for themselves’ (p. 216). In sum, not only do these data misrepresent when they are presented alone, they also promote a ‘blame the victim’ position.

The data that Rowse is referring to comes from sources including the Productivity Commission, Families, Housing, Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, Council of Australian Governments Reform Council, state/territory Departments of Health, Education and the like. Presented in isolation these data can misrepresent. Yet this does not make disadvantage inconsequential or imaginary. Rather, these data should be balanced by others, both qualitative and quantitative, that speak to the reasons why Aboriginal people wish to retain their particular lives. Such juxtapositions help to elucidate Indigenous dilemmas including ones that possibly only individuals and their immediate kin can resolve. In addition, data on disadvantage should be contextualised – both historically and comparatively. Is Aboriginal disadvantage more or less than some time ago? What criteria inform such a judgment? How do regions in Australia compare? How does current disadvantage and responses to it compare with that of other indigenous and non-indigenous peoples? What is ‘too expensive’ or a ‘waste’ in relation to justice for Australia’s first peoples? Deployed in a proper way, quantitative data establish the structural nature of disadvantage and its patterning through space and time.10 This type of observation serves social justice more than it undermines it.

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There is another distortion though. In the course of the last decade, Aboriginal disadvantage was ushered into public consciousness by dramatic portraits of pathology among people who were described as being alcoholic, child abusers, violent and criminal. In 2009, with the Western Arrernte in mind, I asked how any such Aboriginal people could ‘accept such words as their descriptors’? This type of reduction, of disadvantage to pathology, refused Aboriginal people as interlocutors of the larger society.  

These accounts often implied that personal pathology is an invariable component of social disadvantage in health, education, employment and the like when in fact they are different phenomena only sometimes related and in complex and partial ways. How to respond to this type of denigration?

A first step involves understanding the ideology behind these accounts of disadvantage that become portraits of pathology. The writer whose work presents this reduction most clearly is the late Helen Hughes. Although her writing follows some conventions of social science, it is also interspersed with dramatic accounts of pathology; descriptions of a people whose life is not constructive on any front.  

The coalescence of an academic and a populist style produces a view of Aboriginal people as spent and in need of total reclamation. Why? Because they are the product of a ‘failed experiment’ in HC Coombs’s purported socialism (pp. 176–177).

‘Socialism’ here refers to Australian governments’ (the public sectors’) interventions with regard to Indigenous employment, education, housing or health where there are no easy market (or private sector) solutions. If it is assumed that by definition there always will be market solutions, or that the only solutions are market ones, this social democratic response to needs and rights becomes misguided, even illegitimate. According to this latter view, with its naturalised notion of market efficiency, any public sector intervention is doomed to fail with a concomitant devastating impact on the citizens involved. Hughes did not need to learn very much about quotidian Aboriginal lives. Their comprehensive pathology is an entailment of her position.

Too often the response from academics has been to accept this reduction and to avoid talk of disadvantage altogether in the name of ‘not pathologising’ Aboriginal people. Similarly, because the attacks of Hughes and others have promoted totalising market ‘solutions’ over government strategies, a common response has been to brand economic policy generally as simply ‘neo-liberal’. Yet this sloppy usage and negative view of economy per se is an ill-wrought strategy that has the air of denialism. In fact the issue should be how to identify the structural disadvantage – for which Aboriginal people are not responsible – that undermines the local potential of not all but still too many individuals.

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12 See Hughes 2007. For my discussions of other instances in which Hughes pathologises Aboriginal people see Austin-Broos 2009.
In sum, I am sceptical of the view that social justice conceived as a fight against disadvantage undermines rather than augments social justice for a people. Nor am I convinced that an Indigenous sector now or soon can be the collective and autonomous voice of a people. At minimum, Aboriginal people need more regional consolidations, more diverse capabilities and genuinely human economies along with alliances that extend into other types of politics. Indeed, the very nature of self-determination for a people encapsulated in a larger sovereign state requires continuing innovation. I am also of the view that quantitative data can be used constructively as well as destructively. Notwithstanding differences with Rowse, I strongly endorse a historical view of an Aboriginal people – a basic tenet of my anthropology. Tim Rowse is a seasoned writer on Indigenous issues. His book deserves a wide readership.

References


Diane Austin-Broos

University of Sydney

Rick Farley’s premature death on 13 May 2006 after an aneurism some six months earlier was sad, sudden and, somewhat like Rick himself, strangely mysterious.

Nicholas Brown and Susan Boden tell the story of the young man working at Balmain Hospital who helped the ‘elderly man’ in a wheelchair up a ramp:

(He) checked carefully that the wheelchair wouldn’t roll. ‘Are you right, mate’ he asked. Farley nodded. The young man walked away, turning to see that the wheelchair was stable. But as he went back to his job, he heard the sirens.

Rick Farley was just 53 years old. At nearly the same age, his father Dick, one day short of 26 years earlier, had shot and killed himself at Kajabbi near Cloncurry. Rick’s father was considerate; taking his life in a washhouse at the back of the house where he was staying as a labourer, long separated from his wife and children. Brown and Boden manage a fine balance to let the reader make up her own mind on stories such as this final one. The authors roll out the known facts, lace the account with the views of friends and colleagues, but leave judgement to the reader.

Played out at the centre of Australia’s major political stages in the 1980s and 1990s Rick Farley’s relatively short life was crowded with action. The biography could be on the shelves of students of Australia’s modern policy transformations in agriculture, trade and the environment as much as in Indigenous affairs. The political and policy analysis and narrative drive (primarily by historian Nicholas Brown it is suggested), is thorough, informative and authoritative. In conjunction with his partner, landscape architect Susan Boden, the stage is carefully set for the Rick Farley act to perform.

And what a performance! Likened by Patrick Dodson in the frontispiece to a cross between Spencer Tracy and James Cagney, Farley played a bewildering number of roles in Brisbane student theatre, in journalism, in pastoral unionism, in agricultural policy, in environmental policy and programs, in native title and in reconciliation. Brown and Boden, in shedding a spotlight on these public roles, highlight the fact that for many close watchers, Rick Farley’s character was enigmatic. The character he brought to a given role or stage was changeable; shifting shape and unable to be pinned by the political soap opera labels of left and right. His one formal quixotic tilt at parliamentary representation was an unsuccessful one for the Democrats in the Australian Capital Territory, also label free. At various times in his career, however, such a tilt could have been under the banner of the Nationals, Liberals or Labor.

The biography is informative and interesting in revealing his early life, including his schooling in Toowong, Brisbane, where Farley attended the ‘muscular Calvinist’ Brisbane Boys’ College, notable for its insistence on straw boaters as
head gear in the Brisbane sun. I remember such boaters as objects of attempted capture by boys from other, less prestigious schools on the same bus route. He then jumped across one suburb to the University of Queensland, joining the heady scene of the early 1970s. At the University of Queensland he took part in ‘a floating party’ of several years duration which emphasised cultural change over political struggle. Rick dabbled pragmatically in the protests of the Bjelke-Petersen era, such as against the Springboks, but also attended the games as a spectator. He was a self-confessed ‘trendy … taking up every cause but committing to none’ (p. 33).

Rick Farley’s hasty exit to Rockhampton in late 1973 ‘with someone else’s wife and someone else’s car’, provided a new stage and new roles, firstly as a journalist for the Rockhampton Morning Bulletin. His emerging interest in the engagement of politics and ‘the search for connection that drove him’ (p. 44) led to a job as a Ministerial officer for Dr Doug Everingham. Everingham was the eccentric local member, and the Whitlam Government’s Minister for Health. The role saw Farley energetically learning the arts of representation, negotiation and political judgement that he carried into future roles. It came to a sudden end when Everingham lost the seat by a slender margin in the 1975 election; only Bill Hayden kept his seat in Queensland in that unprecedented and as yet unrepeatable rout.

Surprisingly, the Rockhampton based breakaway Cattlemen’s Union offered the ex-Labor staffer a new stage to perform on, hiring him as their public relations officer. Farley took to the role with gusto, even though he played it as ‘an inside-outsider’. Brown and Boden point out that this would not be the first or the last time he took that stance. It was from his decade long base in the Cattlemen’s Union that Rick Farley began to build a significant and lasting engagement in rural politics, leading to his eventual appointment as the Executive Director of the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF).

The policy stage in Canberra in the second half of the 1980s was tumultuous. Farley found his role at the NFF enabled him to get involved and engaged in significant change processes. While the NFF remained traditionally locked into a National Party base, Farley opened up dynamic relationships with Hawke Government Ministers and their advisers. His appetite for negotiating win-win outcomes, especially to benefit people on the land was always sharp. Often his changing policy role required rapid costume changes, out of the denim and into the suit and vice versa.

Boden and Brown do a careful, thorough job of the policy issues of the period, canvassing archive files, meeting minutes and interviewing protagonists. The chapters on agricultural policy, land care and support for people doing it tough on the land are worthwhile contributions to that significant policy history in their own right.

It was the advent of the reconciliation process in 1991 that brought Rick Farley into Indigenous issues for the first time. The issues were to become a lasting
passion. The authors give a good summary account of the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, chaired by Patrick Dodson, and illustrate the challenges faced by the Council. The description of the first meeting of the Council is informative, insightful and accurate. The work of Rick Farley in bringing Aboriginal land council leaders and pastoralists together to fashion joint approaches to common issues was innovative and led to lasting relationships; mutually valued by the protagonists for decades to come.

Before the Council could step out its careful work however, the High Court *Mabo* decision changed the landscape. Rick Farley found himself with the challenging role of containing the visceral reactions of the pastoralists (especially in Western Australia), and seeking to negotiate a lasting solution that would ensure pastoral lease security and recognise Aboriginal title rights. This was not an easy line to prosecute and he burned much of his political capital inside the farmers’ organisation in the process. Many of the members of the NFF, viewing the decision as apocalyptic, regarded Farley’s role in trying to weld a workable compromise as treacherous. He certainly found himself out of step with the majority view in the organisation. The disjunction became more pronounced when a new NFF President, Donald McGauchie, was elected in 1994. It is illuminating that the hosts for Rick’s farewell from the NFF in 1995 were not the officials of the NFF but the representatives of the sectors Rick had courted in the last decade: Paul Lyneham from the media, John Kerin from the Labor Party, Pat Dodson from Indigenous Australia and Philip Toyne from the environmentalists. While he could claim that his work ensured that ‘farmers were no longer being regarded as rednecks in the national debate’, the farmers and their representatives were mostly happy to see him go.

The authors cover the next decade of Farley’s life with attention and care. They maintain a circumspect, non-judgemental attitude on the break-up of Rick’s marriage to Cathy and his new relationship with Linda Burney. They cover thoroughly the complexities of his work with the National Native Title Tribunal on issues such as the Century Mine and the landmark Cape York Heads of Agreement. They show how Farley changed his place on the stage; from the central national spotlight to the regional and local. The issues were equally complex but resolution seemed perhaps more visible and achievable. In Bathurst in 2001, he gave a blunt message:

> At the end of the day, when everyone has packed up and gone home, it is the people in the community who have to live next door to each other and deal with each other.

Nicholas Brown and Susan Boden have given us an insightful and thoughtful biography of an important and influential Australian.

Kevin Keefe

Brisbane

The first part of the book, now 30 years old, shows signs of age. Broome quotes Memmi and Fanon; Aboriginal warriors are ‘brave’ while Army officers merely ‘ape’ the gentry of England in building villas and estates. Aboriginal women are not given much credit for initiating or continuing love matches with the settlers, mere ‘targets for the men’s libidos’. When squatters were infuriated by Aboriginal sheep theft, we are reminded that this was the same emotion felt by Indigenous owners when pushed off their land.

All these are interesting facets of changing Indigenous historiography rather than an approach to be condemned: most of us wrote like this in the 1980s, with, I hope, good reason. But later research has revealed many local differences, or other aspects of well known events, which can now be explored. Fred Cahir in his Black Gold (ANU E Press, 2012) found that one of the most significant aspects of the Victorian goldrushes was the way in which the dispossessed people took economic advantage of the many thousands of not necessarily hostile whites in the clan lands. Rachel Perkins’ first instalment of the SBS series First Australians stressed the ongoing constructive relationship between the Sutor family and Windradyne, and later Wiradjuri people, to juxtapose beside the Bathurst massacres of 1824. Of course, Broome is often attentive to these changing attitudes as well as to the new research findings. On page 17 he notes that the Bass Strait sealers ‘generally mistreated’ their women. On page 71, in what may have been a paragraph inserted later, he writes ‘However, it was never that simple. Some women forged a life with the men to whom they bore children and they refused to be rescued. … When sealing became unsustainable … they showed the white sealer men how to live off the land, and to fashion a new industry of catching mutton birds’. Indeed. A fair judgement of the northern pastoral industry from 2013 would be that uncontrolled, sporadic and deadly violence was very much more common that most Australian realise, but also that the safe havens where fugitives from murdering pastoralists could rush to were also more common.

It is true that we have not, by any means, heard the last word on frontier killings, mission and reserve administrative violence, or the numbers of stolen children (all still, to a greater or lesser extent, underestimated) but rather than continue to revise old editions, I think it would better now to start again. Any new approach surely will have to be comparative, not just to the old war-horses of Canada and New Zealand, but will consider colonisation in South America and the Pacific. Conversely, there will be greater reference to local area studies like Goodall and Cadzow’s powerful Rivers and Resilience (UNSW Press, 2009), in making allowance for the idea that most Aboriginal people were everywhere, and all the time, though generally unobserved: not resisters, not victims, not agents, not heroes, not turncoats – just people getting on with their lives as best they could. Thirdly, a new history will confront urban history. Most Aborigines now live in the big cities. More than historians realised, they never left, rather, numbers...
began to increase since at least the 1920s. We need to see the changes historically: the Redfern riots of the 1970s can be said to parallel the disturbances in country towns for most of the twentieth century as thousands of the homeless, jobless or evicted moved from unsafe towns to what they thought were safe towns. Swelling numbers of town campers ensured that the new havens quickly became unsafe, and the moves continued. By 1960 welfare rations were becoming scarce, jobs evaporating and rural health declining. The capital cities were the last hope: Aboriginal numbers in favoured suburbs skyrocketed, and state governments and police reacted in the way that the town councils had always done. The urban populations were here to stay.

Since the 1970s self-identification and its implications have become critical in the suburbs as much to other Aborigines as to everyone else. The last times when Aboriginal people could identify with each other in a friendly fashion irrespective, or ignorant, of clan affiliations while keeping their identity secret from urban whites, was about 1980. The last time in the schools was perhaps 1969, when the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme began to identify Aboriginal children, often with adverse consequences from other students and staff. Today, who identifies and on what basis, and from what time and from which family, is the central urban question upon which all other historical discussion turns. And the cities are where most Aboriginal people live.

Nevertheless Broome’s study will remain important. He is right not to pull any punches when he writes ‘Life under Aborigines Protection Boards could be like a police state, although most Boards never had sufficient resources to achieve their full power.’ He traces the foundations of the Legal, Housing and Health Services and is not afraid to spell out where Aboriginal greed, as well as inexperience sometimes brought individual associations to ruin. The 1976 Land Rights Act (NT), and the Mabo, Yorta Yorta and Wik cases are dealt with extensively and fairly and will be an excellent starting point for further study. Sometimes his enthusiasms get the better of him: while Sir William Deane is ‘that great Australian’, his greatest invective is reserved for John Howard. This is distracting, given that presumably one aim of the book is to win over the doubters. Howard himself confessed to being ‘an artefact of who I am and the time in which I grew up’; moreover Broome constantly stresses, and rightly, the long and ineradicable years of physical and mental colonisation from which nobody, on either side, could easily escape.

There are a few issues that I take issue with. I do not agree with Broome’s summation of the cattle industry as not one of slavery (according to a definition of an African American scholar) but arguably ‘colonised labour’. He quotes the Berndts’ End of an Era (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1987), without coming to what seems to me to be the necessary conclusion that on some of the Vestey stations at least, life was worse than slavery: it was virtually unendurable both physically and emotionally. That some retired ringers may still look back at ‘cattle times’ with affection is beside the point – so do some East Germans long for the old days; moreover, women who did not work with cattle (and in the Northern Territory there were many) had a very much rougher time of it
when confined to the stations. Describing Noel Pearson as on the Left on land rights, but on the Right when claiming that welfare dependency had reached ‘genocidal proportions’, illustrates how the old left-right dichotomy can be a decidedly unhelpful tool of analysis in Indigenous affairs, though ideologues of every persuasion try to make it so. The book, completed a year after Rudd’s apology, ends on what has turned out to be an unwarrantedly hopeful note. The abuse that Aboriginal children, as well as tens of thousands of others, suffered as revealed in the ‘Forgotten Australians’ report only makes more painful the absence of financial compensation. ‘We’re stuck with each other and we’re stuck with our history’ writes Bunurong historian Bruce Pascoe. That seems to be a better summary from the viewpoint of 2013.

The book, rather than simply, in parts, showing its age, reveals the changing times and circumstances in which Indigenous history is interpreted. Broome, one of the country’s foremost historians of Aboriginal Australia, has produced an important and enduring work.

Peter Read

University of Sydney

The front cover of The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts gives a view across open spinifex country in the Gibson Desert. Rocks dominate the foreground of a lush deep green plain. The sky has dark clouds, harbingers of a coming storm. This image immediately shifts the mind’s eye away from the expected. It is not the typical image of an Australian desert: where are the deep red denuded dunes and salt pans baking beneath cloudless skies? The book’s title, with the word ‘Deserts’ in plural, further hints that Mike Smith’s work may be no ordinary volume about the archaeology of Australia’s desert interior, a place more commonly imagined as a single expanse of hot, timeless and arid land.

By choosing this cover and title, Mike sets an expectation that readers will be taken on an intellectual journey into countries less travelled. For those prepared for this journey, you will not be disappointed. In 350 pages of text we are given a tour de force of Australia’s deserts and the vibrant cultures that have inhabited them for some 50,000 years. The book brings together sources from archaeology, environmental history, ethnography and anthropology into an impressive and symphonic human history of half a continent.

Mike is able to successfully orchestrate these detailed sources in his book because he treats the deserts very much like the way he treats archaeological sites. His approach to excavating Puritjarra Rockshelter, where his dates tripled the age of human habitation in the interior, was to see the site as having a morphing character. He saw it as a living piece of landscape sculptured over time by humans and nature. And this is how he has approached his synthesis of Australia’s deserts.

For Mike the desert is alive. It has a symbiotic relationship with humans, as well as having its own natural history. For him, the impacts of both of these processes are left behind as stratigraphic traces in the landscape. It is these traces that are then given life by people, like himself, who now live and work in the deserts. In this sense, Mike’s book is as much a history of ideas about the deserts as it is an archaeology or natural history of these landscapes. By giving eminence to the impact of ideas to our understanding of deserts, Mike seamlessly binds the diverse sources, intimately engaging the reader with the deserts’ deep past. One can, for instance, feel the crushing impact of heat, flies, sandstorms and thirst on the South Australian Museum team who struggled in appalling conditions at Lake Mulligan to uncover vast numbers of unknown megafauna fossils, demonstrating in one field season the past richness of this now bleak landscape. These insights draw us into understanding how the deep past of the desert is an entangled history of people, past and present, of the sweeping forces of nature, and of great archaeological discoveries.

The early chapters (Chapters 1–3) place the Australian deserts in a national and international context, while challenging the notion of there being one
unchanging desert environment. He slowly draws us closer to this view by introducing the Australian deserts as living and changing sets of landscapes. Engaging with these landscapes are researchers and explorers as diverse and often unfathomable as the deserts themselves. Mike sees these people as having shaped how we see the desert landscapes as much as the wind and aridity. These early chapters are the setting for the heart of the volume, which is a more or less a chronological account of human habitation from the Late Pleistocene to the present.

In Chapter 4 Mike brings together information from some 40 archaeological sites spread across the continent from the Pilbara to the Nullarbor Plain to tell us about life in the deserts in the period from 50,000 to 30,000 years ago. He gives a prodigiously detailed account of the known material for this period. While much of this chapter is naturally concerned with the movement and spread of people into the deserts, the chapter also analyses the evidence in terms of important themes like stone tool technology and subsistence economy. Chapter 5 deals with one of the most interesting and debated periods of occupation in the deserts from about 30,000 to 12,000 years ago. This includes Last Glacial Maximum (LGM), from about 30,000 to 18,000 years ago, a period of extreme aridity for which various models of human adaptation of the deserts have been proposed. The book deals with these very important models in a fair and even handed way, testing the theories against the known data and showing where gaps exist for further research. Chapter 6 deals with the final phase of prehistoric occupation, from about 12,000 years ago to European colonisation, again giving a thorough and lively review of the known archaeology. Several themes are discussed in this chapter, many broadly centering on ideas of cultural intensification, including the uptake of significant grindstone technology and the introduction of new flaked stone artefacts into the desert toolkits.

Chapters 7 and 8 diverge from the chronological narrative and deal with rock art and place, and trade and exchange. These subjects dovetail quite neatly with the ideas of intense social change alluded to at the end of Chapter 6. The rock art chapter (Chapter 7) is a broad and sweeping endeavour to characterise and analyse rock art of very large regions. It runs the risk of not satisfying experts in that field. Certainly, the approach is different to many contemporary rock art projects that are more focused on detailed subjects or confined geographic areas. Nevertheless, Mike’s approach gave me, a rock art novice, a good understanding of the subject and the broad types of analysis attempted by researchers. The chapter on trade and exchange (Chapter 8) is a wonderful summary of what we know about trade and exchange across wide areas of the continent. It looks at the different approaches to research in this area and highlights the importance of trade and exchange in contemporary societies.

The final chapter (Chapter 9) looks at archaeology and the classic desert ethnographies. By leaving this chapter till last Mike is able to bring the force of summary to general statements about the archaeology and link these to a historic narrative about redefining Aboriginal desert cultures. There has been a recent move away from this sort of historic discourse in Australian archaeology.
Mike’s elegant re-engagement with both historic questions and sources will hopefully reopen and widen this interesting debate. In this final chapter I would have liked to have seen a bit more on the connection between concepts of the Aboriginal Dreamtime and Western ideas about the deep past, but perhaps that is for another book.

Archaeology books are usually weighty technical works of interest mostly for professionals. *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts* is certainly suited to an academic audience. The ideas and data in the book are able to be tested, dismantled and built on. This was in fact one of the core aims of the book, and Mike hoped this would happen after what he calls a ‘polite interval’. But *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, as I suggested earlier, has different and unexpected qualities. It is much more than just another fine tertiary text.

Like the unexpected view of the Gibson Desert on the books cover, I think this volume will have an appeal to wider audiences unintended (at least consciously) by its author. It is in many ways a story of imagined past landscapes. After my first read of the book, it brought to mind a time in 1986 when I worked on Mike’s crew excavating on the Lake Woods lunette in the central Northern Territory. I recall witnessing his remarkable ability to think ‘with’ the landscape, to imagine its past. Around our campfire at night he talked with us and the Aboriginal Traditional Owners about how he saw the stratigraphic layers in the trenches and how these related to each other and to the living landscape. My good friend Nugget Collins Jarpata later told me the creation stories about the lunette, and remarked to me that Mike also ‘knew’ how the country came to be. This was one of those very rare occasions when an Aboriginal person of high degree acknowledges a kindred soul from a very different culture. For me, this synchronicity of imagining the deep past exemplifies the wide appeal of Mike’s work as much as his formidable scientific achievements.

Rob Paton

Australian National University

As this review goes to press Shino Konishi’s masterly book is shortlisted for the New South Wales Premier’s History Award and I for one would not be surprised if it is successful, marking a wonderful achievement for a first book. Whether or not this happens, this is a landmark work that illustrates perfectly the sometimes elusive paradigm of ‘good history’; that work that is marked only by a perfect rendition of the sources, untainted by theory. The scope of this book is a remarkable feat for an early career researcher. Certainly its inclusion as the eighth book in the prestigious Pickering & Chatto, Body, Gender and Culture Series is indicative of its intrinsic value as history. It is wonderful to see a publisher that values such fine scholarship and allows and values such a rich lode of endnotes in this volume.

This book illuminates the earliest of the encounters of European explorers with Aboriginal people on the coast of Australia in such a way that the unguarded humanity of the players is foregrounded. In fact, as Konishi explains, it is the bodies of each that were of the greatest interest to each other. They were interested to explore the extent and the limits of their admittedly culture-bound ideas of humanity, from the bodily functions of eating and drinking, speaking, eliminating, to the preference for adornments, communications, physical prowess including in battle and in sexual activity. They went so far as to be ‘touching, scrutinizing, grooming and adorning one another’s bodies’ and of course as Konishi reminds us, contact itself means to touch. The order of chapters into ‘Skin’, ‘Hair’, ‘Face’, ‘Carnal Bodies’, ‘Martial Bodies’, ‘Communicating Bodies’, ‘Indolent Bodies’ and ‘Testing Bodies’ reflects this and also suggests very close reading, organisation and documentation of the records.

Embodied encounters in the Enlightenment world are influenced too by the ideas of the superiority of man in the state of nature, perhaps a trifle threatening to the European male of the time who emerged from an urban world. These early expeditions were interested to establish how the native man was measuring up, by concentrating on documenting everything possible about the people they came across and making critical assessments and comparisons of them in the context of their social and cultural milieu.

The encounters of the explorers and Aboriginal men are described in such a way as to become snapshots in time, made possible by the careful observations and records of the eighteenth century expeditions that Konishi has researched. These are more leisurely encounters than those of earlier explorers and qualitatively and quantitatively different from those that followed in the intensity of colonisation. The ideology of the Enlightenment and the interest in man in a state of nature, was importantly a product of the extreme wealth generated by slavery and colonisation whereby wealthy patrons sought to support a wholesale quest
for knowledge. Further opportunities for investment were also welcomed of course. In the 33 years between 1770 and 1803 the coast of Australia was like the proverbial Pitt Street Sydney; more than 20 European expeditions landed here.

Accounts by the Englishmen Joseph Banks, James Cook, Tobias Furneaux, Watkin Tench, David Collins, Matthew Flinders, the limited accounts of the Spaniard Alejandro Malaspina, and the more extensive accounts of the French Nicolas Baudin, Marc-Joseph Marion-Defresne, Antoine-Raymond-Joseph Bruny d’Entrecasteaux, Jacques-Julien Houtou de Labillardière, Jean-Francois de Galaup de La Perouse, and especially those of François Péron are examined for this volume. These are the men on expeditions that met Aboriginal people and were able to engage with them for some time, or who were a part of the early colony at Port Jackson.

Konishi is not only a masterly scholar but she has a particularly light and nuanced turn of phrase that engages the reader from the first. For example, I found the introduction to this book more exciting and immediate than any that I can recall. Konishi makes these often ‘mundane’ encounters between men that were ‘often tense, sometimes perplexing and occasionally convivial’ (p. 4) and the debates that surround them alive and engaging, of absolute import to contemporary issues in Aboriginal Australia.

Victoria Grieves

University of Sydney
Heritage sounds such a simple concept, most easily characterised by that old advertising slogan ‘Things we want to keep’. But even with that characterisation there are conflicts: is it just about things, or about intangible qualities as well; who is entitled to be ‘we’ in this statement, that is to say, who are the stakeholders in the heritage; is ‘wanting’ enough or is legislation needed to support it, or is it the other way around and the legislative protections should be subordinate to the strength of ‘wanting’ in the general community; and finally, what is involved in ‘keeping’ heritage things, who pays the costs and for how long should they be kept? In addition, for much non-indigenous heritage it remains true that heritage-rich places are places where nothing much happened (Davidson 2008a); in others, archaeologists recover lost memories where places whose heritage importance we can now evaluate were once disregarded and forgotten ‘lost histories’ (Davidson 2008b). This fascinating book gives food for thought on all of these questions.

The volume arose from the 2nd Indigenous World Archaeological Inter-Congress, held in New Zealand in 2005. It has 12 chapters and five appendices. The chapters are an overview introduction by Allen and Phillips, discussions of cases in Native American (by Watkins), Argentinian (by Haber, Londoño, Mamaní and Roda), Puerto Riqueño (by Luz-Rodríguez), Solomon Islands (by Foana’ota) as well as two Australian (by Mosley, and by Ross) and four New Zealand (by Phillips, by Allen, by Rika-Heke, and by Solomon and Forbes) and an overview by Nicholas arguing that indigenous approaches to heritage should be brought into the mainstream rather than developed as a branch of archaeology separate from other approaches. Only four of 15 authors self-identify as Indigenous in the biographical notes at the end of the book.

The appendices include several documents that guide the behaviour of practitioners in relation to indigenous heritage:1 1) the first Code of Ethics of the World Archaeological Congress – which formed the basis for the Code of Ethics of the Australian Archaeological Association, which has subsequently been modified (Davidson 1991; Davidson, Lovell-Jones and Bancroft 1995); 2) the Vermillion Accord on Human Remains, which contributed to the passing of NAGPRA, the US Statute governing the repatriation of Native American cultural property, especially skeletal remains;2 3) the Tamaki Makau-rau Accord on the

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Display of Human Remains and Sacred Objects, agreed at this meeting; the Mataatua Declaration on Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous People that arose from the First International Meeting on that subject in 1993; and a summary of discussions at the meeting on the subject of relationships between archaeologists, teaching institutions, heritage organisations and Maori, which has many recommendations that can be generalised to other situations, and legislations. For my money, the book is worth reading for the implications of Appendix 5 alone.

As is usual with edited volumes, especially from broad issue international meetings, there is too much detail to summarise here. But there are some important things to be said about Heritage that kept coming to mind as I read the book. It is certainly a thought provoking book, and well worth reading for that reason.

Heritage is an ambivalent concept applied in different ways by different people in different contexts. As several of these papers show, research archaeologists now routinely involve indigenous people in their work at some level. The most consistent interaction is when archaeologists engage with recording, salvage, or mitigation work in advance of industrial developments (using a broad definition of industrial throughout this review to encompass both conventional meanings in terms of mining, drilling, pipeline laying, infrastructure projects, plant construction, and housing and other construction developments, as well as agriculture). Industry, broadly conceived in this way, is required by law to engage with indigenous communities. As several of these papers emphasise, these three sets of interests do not always coincide. The situation can be pictured as a standard Venn diagram of three intersecting circles representing ‘research’, ‘industry’ and ‘Indigenous culture’.

None of these three groups is coterminous with any other, though in some countries with a relatively short indigenous history (such as New Zealand), all archaeology may be quite close to indigenous knowledge (see chapters by Phillips and by Allen), but at the same time, indigenous culture will encompass much more than archaeologists can study. In some regions (such as the Inland Pilbara), industry may be so overwhelming that it threatens to obliterate all archaeology and all the land associated with indigenous culture. In rare cases (as in the Solomons), archaeologists have worked closely with indigenous people such that it is now indigenous people who are undertaking archaeological research to enrich their own people’s history and heritage (see chapter by Foana’ota). Appendix 5 explicitly recommends that Maori groups should follow this, and it applies equally in Australia. In her chapter, Rika-Hele discusses why Maori do not engage with archaeology.

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In fact, almost all of the variables in these relationships are open to negotiation in one context or another. Industry could choose to avoid impacts on heritage in particular circumstances (not to mine when a sacred site is in the middle of the ore body; not to establish a factory in a place of importance to indigenous people) – such choices are rarely exhibited in this or any other collection, but some would say they are not unknown. Indigenous people may feel they have no rights in relation to heritage sites on their traditional land because of the narrative of cultural change produced by non-indigenous archaeologists. Others are re-asserting the rights they have been denied historically (see chapter by Haber et al) or revisiting the way in which colonial society constructed an identity that was indigenous that was different from that it encountered (see Chapter by De la Luz-Rodríguez). Curiously, only archaeologists are unlikely to claim that a particular region is of no interest to them, and perhaps this is one reason why they have been leaders in the recording and registering of sites in advance of industrial development, now, generally, in company with indigenous people. Yet the devastating conclusion in Appendix 5 is that ‘Archaeology at present is a tool for managing destruction of Maori heritage sites’, something that has been said of Aboriginal sites in Australia too. This is made inevitable by another comment in Appendix 5 that ‘The fact that private consultants are paid for by developers can raise concerns about professionalism, or lack of it.’

There is always talk in heritage circles of the protection of heritage places (rarely landscapes) by legislation, yet Allen documents here, just how much legislation may vary. In practice, such protection is often wafer thin, and generally subordinated to the interests of industry, justified using phrases such as ‘the well-being of the whole local community’ (see chapter by Phillips, p. 144). Phillips also quotes McGovern-Wilson about making the results of archaeological work ‘a meaningful contribution to every New Zealander’s understanding of the past’. I have argued previously that such a contribution can only be made by writing the results of the work as a narrative, similar to but different from the oral traditions that connect the places of indigenous people. That is, after all, how countries (such as Spain or Britain) which do not distinguish between their indigenous and their non-indigenous people use archaeology as part of their historical narrative (Bradley 2006). It is urgently needed for Australia (Davidson 2010).

The problem is that it may not be appropriate for non-indigenous archaeologists alone to write such narratives, as that may simply echo the evil effects on indigenous peoples of colonial pasts. Rather, as Nicholas and others suggest in this volume, we should encourage indigenous people to become archaeologists and write their own narratives of these lost histories. My own prejudice as an archaeologist is to continue writing archaeo-histories without pretending that what I am writing is necessarily what indigenous people want to hear, but I recognise that this is not the only way ahead. As Allen says (p. 175) ‘The threat to archaeological places is so great that it is necessary for archaeologists to surrender control over the archaeological heritage in order to secure its lasting survival.’
This would make an excellent textbook for any courses about indigenous heritage because of its wide-ranging discussion of issues and its carefully and wisely presented case studies.

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Iain Davidson

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Bladensburg National Park is one of Queensland’s more remote national parks, located in the north-west of the state near Winton. It is promoted as having ‘spectacular views from flat-topped mesas and plateaus, residual sandstone ranges and vast grassland plains’. It is indeed spectacular as any visitor would attest. But this Park also has a dark history and one that does not feature prominently in the tourist literature of the region. In the late 1870s, it was the site of a major massacre of the Koa people. How many died is unknown but a contemporary report said ‘nearly the whole tribe was killed’. The site is now called Skull Hole and its remoteness and tranquility belies its bloody past.

Conspiracy of Silence: Queensland’s Frontier Killing-Times by Cairns historian Timothy Bottoms convincingly demonstrates that the massacre at Skull Hole was not an isolated event or aberration in colonial Queensland. Bottoms set himself the task of systematically documenting all known or recorded massacres of Aboriginal people in colonial Queensland. Since Ray Evans’ pioneering work Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination was published in 1975 (Australia and New Zealand Book Co), extensive research has been undertaken on frontier relations in colonial Queensland. In particular, detailed accounts and analysis have exposed numerous massacres showing how violent early encounters were between Europeans and Aboriginal groups. Invaluable though this body of work has been, it has generally focused on certain regions (for example Noel Loos on north Queensland) or specific incidents such as the mass poisonings at Kilcoy Station, or the clashes at Hornet Bank or Cullin-la-go-Ringo. What has been lacking is a detailed overview of all documented encounters that resulted in the multiple deaths of Aboriginal people. Not anymore.

Bottoms’ work admirably fills this gap. He has exhaustively researched published works, primary sources, oral records as well as interviewing informants and visiting sites to systematically document massacres on the frontier. Bottoms defines a massacre as killings of at least five or six and does not extend his analysis to the deaths of smaller numbers.

This book is not pleasant reading. Bottoms does not let up. It is a relentless narrative of massacre after massacre throughout the length and breadth of colonial Queensland. Bottoms explores the events region by region as the frontier moved west and north. He first examines south-east Queensland and then moves on to southern Queensland and then to central Queensland. Southwest Queensland and the Channel Country are the focus of Chapter 4. Chapter 5 explores poisonings and sexual exploitation on the frontier. The following chapters document massacres in central Queensland, north Queensland and Cape York Peninsula, the rainforest areas in north Queensland, and lastly the gulf country and western Queensland. One of the key players in the attacks on Aboriginal groups was the Native Police which was established in 1848 and
operated until the end of the century. By the end, the evidence is beyond doubt that the frontier in Queensland was characterised by a succession of violent encounters. It is not, as earlier accounts of Queensland’s history attempted to demonstrate, that while some massacres did occur, they were merely isolated incidents.

While *Conspiracy of Silence* presents an extensive catalogue, Bottoms is well aware that he may not have documented every massacre. Other killings could have occurred and easily gone undetected. Many pastoral properties had outstations situated in very remote and inaccessible locations. Clashes could easily have occurred without the knowledge of the outside world.

Apart from exposing the extent of major killings on the frontier, *Conspiracy of Silence* constantly reminds us how relatively recent these events were. They did not occur in the distant past but within two or three generations. Many stories are embedded in local oral traditions. For example, Cecil Ngaka Ebsworth was a Wangkumara man from the Channel Country who was born in 1919. When interviewed in 1981, he related how he had seen skulls and bullets from a massacre in 1872 at Mt Leonard Station. His great-grandmother who had been told about the incident was alive at the time. Hazel McKellar, the author of *Matya-Mundu: A History of Aboriginal People in South West Queensland* (Cunnamulla Australian Native Welfare Association, c1984) and the source of information about a massacre in the early 1880s at Monjarree waterhole in south-west Queensland, was born in 1930 and died in 2003. She learnt about the incident directly from her mother-in-law, Granny McKellar. Granny McKellar, who died in 1971 aged 101 years, was a young child when this massacre occurred. Ernie Grant, a Jirrbal/Girrimay Elder from north Queensland, was a young man in 1954 when told graphic stories of a massacre of his people by his grandfather. But stories about massacres and violence also have been transmitted in the families and descendants of the perpetrators, although these families are less forthcoming.

Because the *Conspiracy of Silence* is singularly focused on events on the Queensland frontier, it could be argued that its value is limited to Queensland history. It might be tempting to conclude that Queensland was clearly different from the rest of Australia and that the responsibility for the violence rested with Queenslanders. However, it was not just the pastoralists and the workers on the runs that were responsible but also investors and absent landlords. The Queensland pastoral industry was heavily dependent on southern investment, particularly from Victoria. While Victorian pastoralists might have tut-tutted over their gin and tonics in the Melbourne Club at the bad behaviour of their northern counterparts, a number would indeed reap rich rewards from the violence that enabled their runs to be cleared of ‘troublesome blacks’. The Queensland frontier was part of the Australian frontier and these events cannot be considered in isolation. Indeed, as Norwegian naturalist Carl Lumholtz commented in 1889 about the Native Police in Queensland: ‘their cruelties constitute the black page in the annals of Australian colonisation’. The Queensland frontier was inextricably part of the Australian story. Events on the Queensland frontier, however, had a even wider impact. They were also part of the grand British colonial enterprise.
Like the re-writing of the Queensland frontier, so too has the broader imperial narrative been rewritten to reveal that bloodshed, violence, coercion, slavery were commonplace as the empire expanded across the globe.

The extent of the deaths documented in *Conspiracy of Silence* had a catastrophic impact on Aboriginal groups throughout Queensland. Few escaped the loss of at least some members. It was not just the loss of life as the result of massacres and sporadic killings that was devastating, but the impact on the economic and social cohesion of each group. Take away for example, a few men who were critical in the food and resource gathering process and suddenly the clan could be facing an acute shortage of resources (to say nothing of how the incursion of sheep and cattle was also disrupting resources).

*Conspiracy of Silence* makes an important contribution to understanding Australia’s part, in particular the complex relationships between Europeans and Aboriginal people on the frontier. It provides a synthesis of scholarship from the last 30 years and dispels beyond doubt the myths that the ‘settlement’ of Australia was a peaceful process.

Thom Blake

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Desert Lake: Art, Science and Stories from Paruku is a compilation of dreaming narratives, personal histories, scientific descriptions, photos and paintings, all centred on the great Paruku lake system, situated on the north-west edge of the Great Sandy Desert (Western Australia). It documents the many, varied responses to the lake, from its traditional owners, the Walmajarri people, to the more recent non-Indigenous arrivals in their many guises; pastoralists, scientists, artists, anthropologists.

And in doing so it reaches far, far back in time. Back to the very beginning. The book begins with excerpts of the dreaming stories that traverse the lake, interspersed with paintings and aerial photographs that give tantalising glimpses of what is to unfold over the coming pages. In part one of the book, the journey into ‘deep time’ continues with geologist Jim Bowler’s essay on what the geological and archaeological record tells us about the site (for example, in dating human inhabitation of the area to nearly 50,000 years). Bowler’s contribution interweaves the story of the lake as revealed by his (and others’) scientific analysis with the story of how that analysis came to happen – though a long-term and ongoing collaboration with the traditional custodians, in particular, Rex Johns. Bowler gently lays out his own evolving response to the seeming conflict between scientific and Walmajarri perspectives, and describes his own personal resolution to the paradox, guided by a ‘sense of mutual empathy with land, its deep time history’ (p. 42). The integration of the two perspectives has also been a preoccupation for some Walmajarri people, and this has been given expression in a painting by Hanson Pye called *Parnkupirti layers*. Pye explains that the layers depict different time depths, with different stories located at each level. It is clear that Pye and Bowler have exchanged perspectives, and they generously allow us insight into that exchange in this volume.

The second part of the book is set in ‘recent times’ and takes us through a range of contemporary interactions with and around the lake. Kim Mahood and John Carty weave together the oral histories of Biddy Chungulla, Launa Yoomarie, Yanpiyarti Ned Cox, Rex Johns, Shirley Yoomarie, Freda Tjama Napanangka, Anna Johns, and Jamie Brown in an essay that tells the story of European ‘discovery’ of the lake and its broader system of creeks and rivers (when ancient names were overlaid with strange-sounding words like ‘Sturt’ and ‘Gregory’), and the subsequent era of pastoral stations and ‘protectionism’, through to present-day land management arrangements.

Following this, a collection of first-person vignettes captures a range of Walmajarri experiences of the past century. Biddy Chungulla describes how her family took refuge on an island in the lake in the fraught days of early contact with Europeans. Rex Johns’ epic life story chronicles a young man growing up in
the new world order of missions and stations, and later during the fight for land rights. Anna Johns discusses the setting up of Mulan community. Veronica Lulu recounts getting sunstroke while living at Billiluna Station. Bessie Doonday also recollects her early working life at Billiluna, and the period after the handing back of the station to the Walmajarri people. Gracie Mosquito’s life story highlights how the regular currents of family life continue to flow alongside the dramatic change that missions and stations brought. Shirley Yoomarie vividly describes some of the mysteries of mission life, such as having her name changed by the nuns (her parents had named her Julie). Megan Boxer details her schooling life, first at Mulan, then Balgo and Broome, and the challenges being away from home brought. Launa Yoomarie and Megan Boxer use both paint and words to record the harrowing story of a massacre of Aboriginal people at Sturt Creek, witnessed by Yoomarie’s Uncle.

Land ownership and management is a theme that emerges from these personal histories. The contemporary challenges are explored in two essays: one on the waterways monitoring undertaken through the Rangers program and the other on the ongoing implications of human interaction with the lake for the fauna that also call it home. Another important locus of cultural exchange and response to Paruku is through art. Non-Indigenous visual artist Mandy Martin explores the combined artistic output of the large Paruku project team and many works are reproduced in full-page spreads with accompanying explanations. Martin’s own ‘Falling star’ works are also included. Art anthropologist John Carty’s informative essay examines the range of Indigenous responses to Paruku, contrasting the canvases of Kukatja/Wangkatjunga artist Rover Thomas, with the more intimate images made by the lake’s custodians. This part of the book also documents the beautiful and multi-layered mapping work undertaken as part of the Paruku project.

With the past and the present dealt with, we are now taken on a journey into the future. This section is comprised of a thoughtful essay from two acknowledged ‘outsiders’ (Jocelyn Davies and Guy Fitzhardinge) on the ongoing challenges facing Mulan community (the principal residence for most of the Walmajarri project participants), with a focus on the inherent strengths that characterise the community (resilience, for one) and the partnerships that the Walmajarri residents are forging in order to sustain community life into the future. Following this are two ‘insider’ perspectives on the future: Paruku Ranger Jamie Brown reflects on his life and role as a Ranger, and shares his ongoing wishes and concerns for Mulan community. Shirley Brown speaks to the significance of the declaration of the Indigenous Protected Area over the lake and the importance of her ongoing work with the various projects that have resulted – such as the Paruku project.

There is good deal more in this book than can be easily be summed up in a book review, for it has attempted to capture something that is itself vast and untetherable. As a thoughtful compilation of many voices, it succeeds. And as a companion for future generations, I wager it will also succeed. For it feels rich and generous and full of good spirit. The larger Paruku project, for which this book is a key artefact, asked the question ‘How are we to live with our shared
history, our shared environments, our shared homes, in difference and respect. And how do we tell these stories together? This book is a fantastic answer to that question.

Sally Dixon

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As global events and relations have become increasingly shaped by visual culture, individual viewers have experienced the power of a single image to arrest their attention, shock their sense of propriety, arouse feelings of sympathy or anger, and propel them to rally against the ill treatment of other people. The catalyst for this masterly inquiry into the role played by photography in Australian human rights history was Jane Lydon’s epiphanous encounter with the image of two chained Aboriginal prisoners on the cover of Charles Rowley’s *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*. This image inspired her to investigate how such images transformed Australian race relations.

Written during the Northern Territory ‘Intervention’, this book explores how photography triggered the recognition of Indigenous Australians as human beings along with campaigning for Indigenous rights from 1900 to the present. *The Flash of Recognition* embraces transformations in the way that visual media itself was conceived, produced and circulated within specific historical contexts, most notably photography’s rise to a privileged position as proof of distant events. It also maps the intellectual and personal histories of particular images of violence or Aboriginal suffering that Australian campaigners deployed to mobilise support for social reform. Specifically, specialist ideas of Aboriginality were disseminated, certain ideas and events seized the public imagination, giving rise to empathy for the plight of Aboriginal people, and either prompted change or failed to do so.

The central principle driving this inquiry is that photographs bearing witness to a colonising past and its legacies have created significant effects in Australian human rights history. Lydon argues that white privilege was a complex rather than monolithic position from which campaigners used photographic images as signs of injustice to intervene in events. This involved the individuals’ choice to look at such images, acknowledge Aboriginal conditions and make them visible to mainstream society, while others variously chose to support such activism, use images to control or exploit, or forget the past and its victims. Lydon thus engages with WEH Stanner’s notion of ‘the great Australian silence’ by demonstrating that this was less the case of not being told, and more about a society, through a slow cultural process, allowing itself to see beyond the logic of colonialism to recognise Indigenous Australians as equally human with distinctive rights as First Peoples. While locating these campaigners within an ethical tradition that Meaghan Morris calls a relationship of ‘critical proximity’ to a lived past, this book also acknowledges tensions over new limits to bearing such witness. Notably, Indigenous demands for control over photographs of ancestors and rights to privacy and dignity to avoid degrading effects and re-animating misery.
In so doing, it provides an invaluable guide as to how historians might respect Indigenous protocols and limitations while advancing a ‘testimonial’ way of seeing to counter enduring tendencies towards historical amnesia.

Drawing on American anthropologist, Faye Ginsberg’s concept of ‘mediascape’, this book analyses the interdependence of media practices with the local, national and international contexts that surround them. This encompasses the development of multiple cultural forms, from their emergence as the dominant modes of visual media to their current place in today’s postmodern world. Through historicising the flow of ideas about Aboriginality, from how it was conceived to how it was received by mainstream society, this study examines the processes by which, firstly, government officials, missionaries and concerned private citizens enabled remote audiences to witness the treatment of Indigenous peoples, and secondly, how their arguments of injustice prompted identification with, empathy for, and action to ameliorate their plight. In addition this study scrutinises factors that limited such outcomes.

Seven chapters are arranged chronologically and thematically around the use of new media by diverse activists to advance specific rights campaigns in different locations across Australia. It begins in Western Australia on the eve of Federation and contends that while local humanitarian campaigns prompted the 1905 Roth Royal Commission, scientific and administrative discourses combined with pastoralist interests, and constrained the perception of neck-chained Aboriginal prisoners by obscuring their misery. Such images were seen as evidence for containing Indigenous savagery and safeguarding progress. Lydon then examines activism against official mistreatment of Aborigines on the northern frontier during the 1920s and 1930s, finding that perceptions of Aboriginal humanity remained constrained by ideas of race and conventions of taste, as mainstream society grew to see the familiar image of chained Aboriginal prisoners as the acceptable symbol of settler inhumanity. Within the following three chapters, the author traces a profound shift in ways of seeing Indigenous Australians during the 1930s through 1960s. Lydon contends that new global principles of human rights strengthened shifts in visual culture leading to sweeping changes in popular acknowledgement of Aborigines as a struggling people, and the emergence of public protest against failed Aboriginal policy. Chapter 6 examines the intersection of an Aboriginal ‘welfare’ movement that used photography to justify its intervention into domestic affairs within rural Aboriginal camps as a means to social uplift into mainstream society, with an oppositional Aboriginal rights campaign led by a coalition of black and white reformers and supported by a bloc of overseas nations during the 1950s and 1960s. The final two chapters examine the emergence of recognition of an Indigenous humanity entitled to distinctive rights, and the subsequent retreat from this high point in Australian race relations. The concluding chapter examines the profound revision of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians since the 1992 Mabo native title judgement recognised Indigenous rights to self-determination and privacy on their own land. In bringing this book to a close, Lydon reiterates the importance of ethical spectatorship within a world so highly informed and
shaped by photographic images. She argues global visual culture can be put to many political uses. Her focus attends less to seeing people as objects of pity than as human beings with rights.

Lydon challenges the prevailing understanding introduced by Henry Reynolds in his groundbreaking 1998 study of nineteenth-century campaigners _This Whispering in our Hearts_, by arguing that the place of humanitarians must be understood within everyday culture. Her approach radically interrogates white privilege and sheds light on humanitarians’ use of photography to actively contribute to and express public understandings of Aboriginality. This book thus sheds light on a central theme of Australian race-relations history.

Photographic illustrations are critical in works of visual culture. _The Flash of Recognition_ is lavishly illustrated in sepia tones and full colour, with attractive design features and stimulating layout. One minor disappointment is that many image source details appear in a small typeface and are located near to the centrefold spine, which impedes their readability.

Overall, this is a perceptive and ambitious inquiry in both scope and complexity of issues. It is a meticulously researched book that draws on an exhaustive range of archival records and visual culture. Lydon provides many original insights, and a sophisticated, satisfying and holistic analysis of the production, circulation, reception and public response to Australian photographic media for a century-plus from 1900. _The Flash of Recognition_ makes important contributions to Australian race-relations history, photographic history and human rights history. It makes a convincing case for the largely overlooked value of photographic evidence in historical research and exemplifies ethical research standards. Lydon has taken considerable steps to respect Indigenous photographic protocols, including seeking moral and/or cultural permissions from the image subject or family. For all these reasons, this book is a valuable resource for students and researchers across these domains.

Jillian Barnes

The University of Newcastle
An insurgent may, in the eyes of some, be a freedom fighter. Armed conflict is often seen differently according to one’s experience and perspective. After the Second World War, many new nations in Africa and Asia emerging from the ruins of colonialism and imperial ambition rewrote their histories to incorporate and acknowledge those who fought for and achieved independence and national sovereignty. These were the former plantation colonies, areas grabbed by European powers for their resources and strategic value, not as the future homelands of colonisers.

In the settler-colonies, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, a very different attitude to Indigenous resistance became entrenched. A greater contrast is hard to imagine. Acknowledging Indigenous efforts to repel intruders might mean admitting that dispossession and invasion had actually occurred, something that legal and political frameworks could not easily admit. Giving respect to those who defended their country against colonisers, according to some, threatened the entire basis of the new settler-nations that evolved from the imperial exercise. Far too much was at stake.

Henry Reynolds’ latest book, *Forgotten War*, asks how Australia will reconcile those who died – at home – in the defence of their countries with the soldiers who fell during the nation’s overseas battles. In some ways, this represents a return to one of Reynolds’ original themes, discussed in his 1993 chapter ‘The Unrecorded Battlefields of Queensland’, in *Race Relations in North Queensland* (James Cook University, Townsville). Twenty years later, the same questions remain unanswered.

Two main issues are presented in this book: how should Australians acknowledge frontier warfare, and how could our national military history be made more inclusive? Along the way, important issues such as sovereignty and national commemoration enter the debate. The book has great importance for the teaching of history in our schools and universities, as a timely corrective to the seemingly never-ending deluge of ‘war histories’ and ‘military celebrations’. For that reason alone, I am grateful to Henry Reynolds.

My own archival research supports Reynolds’ contention that the frontier, rather than exploration or pioneering was ‘the central thread of Australian history’ (p. 172). Frontier warfare, as Reynolds argues, is central to ‘an understanding of both the past and the present’ (p. 3). He notes that both the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Australian War Memorial, the two main institutions fostering the ‘militarisation of Australian history’, are ‘silent about frontier war. It is as though it didn’t exist’ (p. 234). This oversight means Australians ‘have the extraordinary situation that Aborigines who died fighting on the other side of the world are recognised while those who were cut down defending their homelands are studiously ignored’ (p. 234).
As far as Reynolds is concerned, Australia’s continued failure to acknowledge that a form of warfare took place when Europeans invaded this continent means the violence and the deaths that occurred during the frontier wars are forgotten. This ongoing omission has powerful implications for settler memorials, as well as for Indigenous people. If the sacrifice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in defence of country, cannot be admitted, then the deaths of settlers also remains as a continuing silent scar on national history. One cannot be dealt with without admitting the other.

The alternative, as far as he is concerned, is the criminalisation of the settlers themselves: ‘If there was no war then thousands of Aborigines were murdered in a century-long, continent-wide crime wave tolerated by government. There seems to be no other option. It must be one or the other’ (p. 136). In the mind of this reviewer, the serial killing was not only tacitly allowed, but actively encouraged by colonial government and society. How else would the murderous activities of forces such as Queensland’s Native Police be permitted to continue, despite public knowledge of the full extent of the violence?

Reynolds’ previous writing on the militarisation of Australian history has been criticised by conservative commentators and some within the armed forces, and no doubt the same arguments will be trotted out again in response to this book. Did Australia exist before European settlement? If not, then the only alternative is an admission that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who died did so in defence of their own sovereign nations. However, as Reynolds notes, sovereignty is ‘a fundamental flaw in Australian jurisprudence’ (p. 193). Similarly, to reject what happened on the frontier as ‘not really war’ means rejecting the opinion of every credible military historian in Australia today, because none omit the frontier from their list of Australian battlefields.

This is an important and timely book that should be read by every teacher and history student in Australia. The fundamental disconnect between the community and the historical profession, and the institutions charged with remembering war and conflict, speaks loudly about the profound gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perceptions of and understandings of our national history. We will only go forward, as a nation united, when all the war dead are acknowledged, honoured and remembered.

Disclaimer: My book The Secret War is acknowledged as a source by Henry Reynolds.

Jonathan Richards

University of Queensland
Aboriginal art, for all the attention it receives, remains underappreciated for the profound impact it has had, and will continue to have, on national and international art. Those of us who write about, research, or share a passion for this art in Australia understand it to be among the most significant movements in our increasingly global art history. *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art: Writing on Aboriginal Contemporary Art* moves past the platitudes and lazy rhetoric to make an eloquent and definitive case for why that is.

‘This anthology’, Mclean states early on, ‘is inspired by a … sense that something significant has been achieved that needs to be historically assessed, and while celebrated, also moved on from’. While Mclean clearly, even cautiously, defines the terrain he is covering as ‘not Aboriginal art as such, but the ideas that shaped its artworld reception’, the book is unmistakably part of a more ambitious project. This publication seeks to draw a line under tired debates and, in so doing, provide a platform for better thinking and writing about art in Australia.

Just as the title sounds two notes, both radically bold (‘How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art’) and descriptively mundane (‘writing on Aboriginal contemporary art’) so does the structure of the book fall into two discrete but related sections: essays and thematically organised excerpts. The anthology is bookended by two of Mclean’s essays: each of them is worth the price of admission. ‘Aboriginal art and the artworld’ is an introduction to the terrain at once so comprehensive and concise that it is tempting then to skip through the next 200 pages of anthologised excerpts. Likewise, the final essay, ‘How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art’ is so astute and compelling there is a danger most readers will flick between these and feel it unnecessary to read the rest of the book. But that would be a mistake. I know because, initially, I was one such reader. Familiar with the major texts about Aboriginal art, I came to this collection more interested in what new insights Mclean had to offer than about reading or re-reading the anthologised excerpts. Yet this is a book that rewards the attentive reader.

Great care, and thought, has gone into the selection and editing of this writing to reveal something more than the sum of its parts. There is a deeper structure to the volume, to the way excerpts have been edited and juxtaposed, to the connections and spaces between individual pieces of writing, in which an unsettled history of ideas can be seen playing out. These ideas, and the ways they were expressed from the early 1980s through to the mid 2000s, are structured into a series of thematic sections. ‘Becoming Modern’, traces the first flush of these ideas in the writings of founding figures in Australian art (such as Tony Tuckson) and anthropology (such as Ronald Berndt) through their development in writers
such as Bernard Smith, Rex Butler, Howard Morphy and Eric Michaels. ‘Zones of Engagement’ then explores the ways in which different regions (or conceptual regions such as ‘Urban’, or indeed the ‘Artworld’) have been conceptualised. ‘Issues’ is a forgivingly broad umbrella for the section in which Mclean navigates how questions as diverse as gender, ethics, aesthetics, appropriation, commerce and politics have surfaced and been negotiated by Australian artists and writers alike.

The final thematic section, ‘Futures’, is, perhaps alarmingly, the slimmest offering in the book. The lack of great writing for Mclean to draw from here reveals not only the limitations in our language around art, but in our capacity to speak with confidence and informed critical conviction about the complex terrain of Aboriginality in Australia. Mclean anticipates and excuses this earlier in the book: ‘If we are yet to see a full historical investigation of the subject, it is not due to the poverty of criticism but the difficulty and profundity of the exercise.’ Of course, on one level, Mclean is right; it is awfully difficult terrain and Australian writers have navigated it better than most. But this concession sits awkwardly, in tension if not outright contradiction, with McLean’s recognition that ‘very few Australian art historians have researched Aboriginal art in any substantial way’.

It is no coincidence that over half of the contributions in this book are by writers operating outside the fields of art history, theory or criticism. It is also telling that nearly one third of the contributions included here are written by anthropologists; a subset of the Australian commentariat whose voice Mclean recognises as ‘the most persistent and authoritative in the artworld reception of Aboriginal art’. Anthropologists were among the first to recognise (and analyse) Aboriginal art simply as art. Those included in this volume have gone on to situate rich descriptions of an emerging tradition within a broader set of historical and cultural processes and transformations. This recognition of cultural practice as dynamic, born of a dialectical tension between innovation and tradition, is at the core of these anthropological interpretations of Aboriginal contemporary art. The same cannot be said for our traditions of art history and criticism. Indeed, Mclean notes that

In some respects it seems that Aboriginal art has always been written about as it was already over. … To a certain extent this continues today among those who feel that the knowledge of the old people, along with the rich spiritual motivation of their art, will soon be lost forever.

This misplaced fatalism proliferates in art criticism, arguably because such writers are operating with a fairly static notion of culture as something people ‘have’ rather than a dynamic set of ideas, values and practices that adapt and evolve in what people ‘do’.

The very premises of culture, or at least our preconceptions about it, are laid bare in the debates around Aboriginal art. Refreshingly the artists in this volume, from Lin Onus and John Mawurndjul to Judy Watson and her notion of Aboriginal art as both ‘Country and Western’, eloquently reveal the tenuousness
of static notions of tradition, identity and culture. What seems self-evident to anthropologists and artists – that culture is not an essential substance but a dynamic and adaptive expression of human creativity – is an idea so seemingly foreign it has left Australian art historians mute (or mutely gnashing their teeth) for decades. Before Aboriginal art, Mclean laments, ‘art historians are dumbfounded. They have no choice but to rewrite their stories, and in the process rethink their methodologies.’

This volume argues for a rich tradition of scholarship in Australia, but it is also a record of the difficulty art historians and art critics in Australia have faced in developing informed and scholarly positions about the artistic tradition they purport to explain (or, as is often the case, not explain). For too long it has been possible for art critics and art historians in Australia to operate as experts and commentators in the field without ever having undertaken significant research on the subject. Mclean himself, as this publication reveals, is not one of them.

To return, then, to the book at hand, it is a notable achievement that Mclean has been able to create his own text, a coherent and singular intellectual collage, out of other people’s writing. For a reader familiar with the original texts, he illuminates them anew as instruments or movements (or discordant regressions) in a larger score. For students or readers coming to the recent history of Aboriginal art in Australia with new eyes, it is hard to imagine a better art historical introduction. But this is much more than a survey or edited volume. Despite Mclean’s assertion that ‘as editor, I have sought to trace the shifting debates and ideas rather than arrive at a final judgement’ the choice of excerpts, and book as a whole, present an ambitious argument. And the title, it must be said, gives it away.

The concluding essay from which the volume takes its title, ‘How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art’, is among the most important contributions to the field in recent memory. Mclean takes the genealogy of ideas he presents in the rest of the book as the foundation for a fundamental shift in the terms of the debate. As our conceptual landscape reorients from the ‘Western modern’ towards the ‘global contemporary’, discussion of Aboriginal art – as this volume attests – has often struggled to find a position that transcends the dated dualisms of ethnographic/fine art, and a language beyond the mental block of modernism. For Mclean, Aboriginal artists have been, are now, and will increasingly be, central to the changing contexts of global art. Developing the pioneering work of Terry Smith in rethinking the ‘contemporary’, he argues that Aboriginal art makes the very category of the contemporary possible. It is no longer a question of how the artworld will accommodate Aboriginal art in its categorical frame, but rather how that frame could even exist coherently into the future without Aboriginal art.

Australian Aborigines were amongst the first to show the artworld, raised on the ethnocentric and historicist blinkers of European modernism, what contemporary art after modernism felt like. In doing this, they played a decisive role in the artworld’s globalisation at the end of the twentieth century.
Mclean is one of the few scholars to seriously apply the challenge of Aboriginal art to the conceptual framework of modernity, the contemporary and the practice of art history. But he is not alone. In his concluding essay, and in the volume overall, Mclean makes the case for the specific gifts, values and merits of our position in Australia as a nation, with a national art movement, that has the capacity to lead the world in its thinking. The contributions from Terry Smith, Marcia Langton, Howard Morphy, Hetti Perkins and Mclean himself are potent reminders of the searching intellectual standards we set here. Given Australia’s relative invisibility on the international art stage, it is easy to forget how much pioneering thought on the biggest questions of contemporary art has emerged from within our own island borders. Aboriginal artists, the volume allows us to see with clarity and conviction, have been the drivers, the demanders, the origins of that thought. McLean’s line of questioning – theoretically global, historically local and anthropologically informed – illuminates myriad paths forward into an emerging and uniquely Australian Art history that would be worthy of the name.

John Carty

The Australian National University

Colleen O’Neill, one of the authors in this excellent book, succinctly describes the state of knowledge about the history of indigenous women’s labour: ‘we know that women worked too. But unlike their male counterparts, women’s work remained marginal to the bigger story of economic transformation’ (p. 194). Scholarship has been undertaken in the past to understand the significance of indigenous women’s work and this book builds on this scholarship to specifically understand what the work meant at particular times and places, but even more importantly, how it relates to the social and economic transitions that were occurring both for indigenous people and the larger society.

The book covers a wide time period associated with European contact and colonialism (from 1830s until the 1980s), and includes diverse geographical areas. In a book of 15 chapters dealing with labour in specific places, nine are associated with the United States with the remaining six dealing with Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. It also has a very helpful overview by Joan Sangster in the first chapter and a short, interesting lesson in beading at the end by Beth H Piatote. Throughout there are excellent photographs illustrating the work being examined. Each chapter is relatively short and many have been worked up from research available from previously published material by the authors.

The strength of this volume is in the way it situates the work in the specifics of time and place as well as in relationship to government policies. This results in sophisticated insights that go beyond the ‘awfulisation’ that can occur when talking about the painful transitions in indigenous societies as they came under the influence of capitalist colonial regimes. This is not to say that awful things did not happen, because of course they did, but equally significant is what is shown about how women managed to cope with changing employment conditions within a society that was not only racist, but also patriarchal. In this sense the book also goes beyond an emphasis on cultural preservation (the tendency of current historians, according to one author) or the processes of erasure in the face of colonisation and tries to understand the significance of women’s labour as entire economies changed and indigenous peoples were engaged in the production and maintenance of both their own and Newcomer communities.

Particularly helpful in understanding the transformation in the work of indigenous women is the different types of experiences examined – sealing and plantation work in Australia’s early history, mining and seasonal fruit picking in California, logging and the fur trade in Canada, and service sector work including school teaching in Oklahoma and the more recent work in casinos. The examples touch on women’s participation in the industries that were either dominant or crucial in particular places and demonstrate how women’s paid labour was an essential part of survival for indigenous populations.
The earliest periods, by necessity, rely almost exclusively on the information provided by either colonial administrators or employers, such as information about the aboriginal women who worked in the sealing trade in Tasmania and those in the fur trade in Canada. The migration of female south sea islanders who worked on sugar plantations as indentured servants in Queensland from 1868–1906 relies on general information about plantation work, government documents and diaries, but most of the information about the work itself, primarily in the fields, comes from the analysis of photographs of women working. The main value of this is that it shows that women worked under the same brutal physical conditions as men.

A major theme in the book is the way that women were either prominent in or dominated certain types of income-generating industry, but as economic conditions were transformed their work was frequently undermined. This was particularly true in the agricultural work of Lummi women in the Pacific West Coast, the blanket weaving of Navajo women as the wool economy changed, the Anishinaabe women in Wisconsin who worked in tourism, which was a notoriously volatile industry. Also significant were the impacts of industrialisation and the general shift of populations from rural to urban areas, particularly in response to government policy and the decline in local opportunities. This is most comprehensively explored in Alice Littlefield’s chapter on the Anishinaabe women in Michigan and the distinction in the work and location of people in tribes that were officially recognised by government and those that were not. Throughout the book a special effort is made to show that women were active agents in both their own lives and in bringing about change in their communities.

The book’s editor, Carol Williams, is to be congratulated for bringing together such a stellar group of scholars on a subject that has not received the attention it deserves. As she notes, the information in this book contests the homogeneity of male-dominated national development narratives. Altogether, it challenges the ‘structural amnesia’ (p. 75) in most historical accounts of indigenous work in an exceptionally readable and informative way. Its insights are ideal for teaching, but the book is also an inspiration and should encourage further scholarship on the work of Indigenous Women.

Marjorie Griffin Cohen
Simon Fraser University
Fiona Skyring’s history of the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia (ALSWA) over the 40 years between 1970 and 2010 is an important contribution to understanding the civil rights movement in 20th century Australia and the role of Indigenous community-controlled services in challenging inequality. It also adds to our understanding of the internal white Australia policy and the depth to which it remains imbricated in our social, political and economic structures and continues to resist demolition.

The book begins where it ends. Discrimination, poverty, over policing, over imprisonment of children and adults, and the numbing institutional brutality by the state and its criminal justice system. In what could have been just another commemorative history she asks very frank questions. Why is racial disparity in Western Australia (WA) now worse than it was when the ALSWA was established? What benefits do Aboriginal people have to show for its existence?

The origin of the service is traced through the influence of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people in wider social movements in WA, including trade unions and the legal profession. Encouragement from the rest of Australia also made an impact, including from the founders of the Aboriginal Legal Service in Redfern and the model it provided. The national networks of Aboriginal people, which became possible after the advent of the Whitlam government in 1972, were also formative in the final developments which led to its incorporation in 1975.

In successive chapters the book follows the ALSWA’s expansion into new territories and their further development. These new territories included WA outside of Perth, the representation of Aboriginal people by lawyers in courts, including in Perth, and of Aboriginal people, working as courts officers, who began to appear in the same courts for Aboriginal people. It traces particular events and themes which have preoccupied Indigenous communities in WA and the ALSWA. Some have been constant. It covers the Laverton Royal Commission; Indigenous languages and the acceptance of the Anungu rules for the interrogation of Aboriginal people in police custody; the quest for recognition of land rights; the problems of providing legal services state wide; the organisational management and reform of the service; the establishment of its own agenda for change including ending violence against women; stopping deaths in state custody including its roles with the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; mandatory sentencing; the advent of native title and its part in resisting WA legislation seeking to reverse the effect of *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* in the *Native Title Act case*; and, the stolen generations and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry and report.

Over four decades the ALSWA grew from a number of voluntary and parallel activities including those of the Justice Committee of the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship Inc into the largest community-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait
I Islander legal organisation in Australia. It has a head office in Perth and 17 regional offices and employs over 100 people. It continues to defend Aboriginal people charged with criminal offences and provides representation in family law matters. It is actively involved in individual civil cases relating to human rights. It also retains a focus on law and advocacy and policy and law reform, community legal education, media, human rights including targeted activities. In Australia’s less formal network of interest group politics it is one of the Indigenous organisations with which state and federal governments feel the need to engage.

The Laverton Royal Commission into the brutal treatment of 30 Aboriginal people at Skull Creek in Wangkatha country was an important early success for the new body. It exposed racism in policing policies which the state would have preferred to keep undisclosed. This brought the service to prominence and into issues of conflicts between official practices and law and customary Indigenous law. The royal commission may have led to the prominence that public inquiries have had in its advocacy role. The ALSWA also followed up on less striking but serious discrimination by drawing attention to the two lists of applications for housing based on race maintained by the State Housing Commission.

These advocacy and representative activities ultimately made the ALSWA more visible in WA with the increasing insistence by Indigenous people on equality in respect of civil rights and over land and resources. The events around Noonkanbah are relatively well documented, the role of the ALSWA less so. The book places this conflict into a wider context and the lesser known resistance to mining in 1977 by the Oombulgurri community on the Forrest River reserve, the site of the 1926 massacre. The struggle to prevent mining exploration at Noonkanbah from desecrating a sacred site was lost. The national and international publicity was a major embarrassment for the federal government. The ultimate result was that it acquired the power to protect areas of importance to Indigenous peoples within states in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 (Cth).

The book also points out significant instances which failed to produce positive outcomes. The frustration of the Seaman Land Rights Inquiry and the government’s rejection of its recommendations overshadows the influence of premier Brian Burke in the Hawke government’s abandonment of its national land rights policy in 1986. The confrontation with the Legislative Council over the ALSWA’s records and the Lawrence government’s introduction of mandatory sentencing are stark examples of the use of state power against both the service and its clients.

Success where it appears is often incremental, such as the spread, from the Northern Territory, of the Anungu rules for the interrogation of Indigenous peoples by law enforcement agencies. Some may also be unstated as they may be difficult to quantify. The manipulation of electoral rolls and intimidation, by scrutineers for the Liberal Party, of returning officers in the seat of Kimberley led to the Court of Disputed Returns sitting at Kununurra, Turkey Creek, Halls
Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Derby. This educated a judge about the fragility of the civil rights of Aboriginal citizens in the north-west. The Chief Justice, Sir Francis Burt, experienced the colour bar in bush hospitality himself when a publican at Kununurra refused to accept his cheque for accommodation when conducting a hearing into the bashing of Aboriginal children.

The book is open in dealing with the conflict to be found in any organisation in management and governance. Not surprisingly the ALSWA’s expansion from criminal law into land, resources and political lobbying meant that its importance to the Indigenous community grew. This saw internal as well as external conflict. One form will be familiar to some other organisations in their early phase, that between the non-Indigenous professional and the Indigenous executive officers. Another was the role of the elected board overseeing the service. That role waxed and waned depending on the relationship between the principal legal officer and the executive officer. When Rob Riley took over as executive officer in the early 1990s the service was at a low point. His skills and commitment re-energised it with a new outreach to, and focus on, the wider WA community.

Some of the conflicts between the ALSWA and other Indigenous organisations are also covered. The maturing of the land rights movement and the appearance of native title posed new challenges for it and its relatively large land and heritage branch. It became a native title representative body for the whole state. This produced conflict with both new land councils and the well-established Kimberley Land Council. Part of the conflict is explained as over the negotiated political and regional approach taken by the ALSWA and the more court-based anthropological approach taken by the NT land councils influenced by the model of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Amendment Act 1978 (Cth). Running through this is also the conflict found in the law imposed on Indigenous peoples by both land rights and native title. These include the differences between people able to remain on their country compared with those not able to as well as the false promises of the Aboriginal Land Inquiry, the Hawke government’s national land rights, and of native title.

One of the great strengths of the book is the voices of the people who have made the ALSWA which continuously speak through it. They carry the narrative forward over the many events and themes. They talk directly to the reader about their experience and memories. For those who have lived through the past 30 years snatches of the events of which they tell of are known. In time they will be a lasting record of these events.

Understandably part of the ALSWA story is yet to be told and set in other contexts. There were wider movements in legal aid in the 1970s which saw, in the first year of the Whitlam government, the establishment of both Aboriginal legal services and the Australian Legal Aid Office. John Toohey QC when he located to Port Hedland also acted for non-Indigenous peoples. The House of Representatives inquiry into Aboriginal legal aid in the late 1970s and the Harkins inquiry in 1986 are covered and were informed by other forms of legal aid. The similarities which led to wider support for legal aid in the 1970s and
1980s, including community legal services, and which appear to have faded in the 1990s and 2000s, are still to be joined up. These need to be more widely explored. This book will contribute to that.

Another story which is only partly revealed is what, if any, has been the impact on those who became involved with the ALSWA in their contribution to other areas of public life? Aboriginal people went on to senior roles in other organisations, the public service and in their own communities. Non-Indigenous lawyers also have become ministers, premiers and judges, including three judges of the High Court of Australia. Other Indigenous organisations also have distinguished former associates but those of the ALSWA may have achieved more prominence than others. Some return in this book to speak of their experiences at the time but rarely of the influence the service had on them or on the roles which they came to later. Understandably these themes are too many for one book, particularly one which is the first in its field.

The core activities of the ALSWA remain around the excessive policing to which Aboriginal people are exposed. The imprisonment rates for Aboriginal people in Western Australia are the highest for indigenous peoples in the OECD. In 2011, the year the book was published, Aboriginal people represented 3.3 per cent of the population of WA yet 68 per cent of all children in juvenile detention and 38.5 per cent of adult prisoners were Indigenous. One explanation for this is suggested to be the trend in advanced English speaking economies to imprison more people in the past 30 years. Any reversal may come from the search for more rational approaches to criminal law enforcement as a result of economic pressure on governments who have less revenue because of pressures to tax less.

What of the honest questions which the author asks about how racial disparity appears to have intensified and what do Aboriginal people have to show for its existence? These may not be the ways to measure the unresolved issues of how Australia remains diminished while Aboriginal people are still seeking equality. The question may be, how much worse would things now be without the ALSWA.

Neil Andrews
Victoria University
Minyjun (M Hale) begins his unique and valuable autobiography with a straightforward declaration that hints at the honest, unpretentious storytelling to come. ‘This is the way my forebears lived in the desert’, he begins, recalling a traditional world that, in numbers of years at least, is not long gone. Minyjun’s own parents, in fact, lived in the traditional way in the Great Sandy Desert before his birth in 1934, and other families continued there until well into the mid-twentieth century. The temporal closeness of this traditional world to the present time belies, however, the extreme societal transformation that Minyjun witnessed over his lifetime within his Ngulipartu Nyangumarta community – a transformation that is chronicled through words and pictures in his stunning book *Kurlumarniny: We Come from the Desert*.

The twentieth century brought social change on a hyper-compressed scale to the Pilbara’s Aboriginal communities. Minyjun clearly saw the devastating effect this can have on cultural continuity; he says with dismay that ‘the town has taken the young people away from us’ (p. 209). And so in order to sustain his part of his people’s story against this cultural erosion, Minyjun created *Kurlumarniny*, a painstakingly-written, beautifully-published and fully-bilingual Nyangumarta-English account of big events and daily happenings, of people met and of knowledge gained over the course of a life well lived. This book will be enjoyed by members of the Nyangumarta community, as well as by linguists, teachers, historians and members of the general public. It will intrigue those who have an interest in the history of Aboriginal political and social movements, both within the Pilbara and in general; it will inspire those who study Indigenous Australian languages, given the large amount of continuous Nyangumarta text it offers; and it will appeal to those interested in new frontiers in Indigenous publishing and bilingual resources.

Minyjun’s book represents a particularly significant and unique contribution to Indigenous literature because it is a life story written entirely by the one who lived it, and entirely in his native language. A longtime Nyangumarta literacy teacher at the community-controlled schools he helped establish, Minyjun did not need the assistance of a ghostwriter; he wrote the Nyangumarta text himself over the course of many years, starting back in 1979. He then worked with linguist Mark Clendon and his daughter Barbara Hale, who is herself fluent and literate in both English and Nyangumarta, to translate the full text into English. The translations are presented on facing pages; each left-hand page is in Nyangumarta while each right-hand page gives the English version of the same text. The translations are eloquent and persuasive, cleanly avoiding the trap of over-literalism that renders some translated stories stilted and choppy-sounding.
Likewise, the Nyangumarta text is clean and readable, following the spelling and punctuation conventions that Minyjun himself helped develop for the Nyangumarta community’s Strelley school system (outlined in Appendices 2 and 4). These rules are logical and consistent, and – most importantly from the reader’s perspective – they comply with the standard orthography now accepted across the region. While some of the other Strelley conventions (e.g., spacing of verbalisers or bound pronouns) do differ slightly from those used in Brian Geytenbeek’s 2008 Nyangumarta dictionary and/or Janet Sharp’s 2004 grammar, these are relatively minor discrepancies (and Nyangumarta scholars have yet to agree on the ‘right’ analysis for all these forms, anyway). In any case, since most people who can read in Nyangumarta learned to do so through the Strelley schools, it makes the most sense to retain their orthographic conventions here.

The main text of the book – Minyjun’s autobiography – is divided into nine chapters. Chapter 1 is introduced, appropriately, by a short Dreamtime story explaining how humans acquired language. Minyjun then progresses chronologically through his story, detailing his life on stations and in mines, his family and education, and his involvement in some of the momentous political and social movements that have defined a modern vision for Aboriginal people both within and outside his community, across the Pilbara and beyond. Specifically, Minyjun focuses on the Pilbara pastoral workers’ strike of 1946, a seminal instance of collective action in which Aboriginal station workers from around the region left their employers in a united protest against poor pay and conditions. He describes how the striking workers supported themselves through alluvial mining, how they organised into business entities and purchased their own pastoral stations, and how they challenged discriminatory laws and police brutality. Minyjun talks about the split that eventually divided the strikers and led to the formation of the Nomads group, in which he was to be a principal member. He then discusses at length the Nomads’ purchase and maintenance of Yurtingunya (Strelley Station), focusing particularly on the development of Strelley Community School, Australia’s first registered, community-initiated independent Aboriginal school (p. 133) and now the oldest continually-operational school of this kind in the nation (Strelley Community School 2012). Minyjun was instrumental in designing the school’s innovative Nyangumarta-English bilingual program, and he taught in the school for decades. Additionally, Minyjun’s family also features prominently throughout the book; he dedicates one chapter to memories from the first years of his marriage, and another to the illness and passing of his wife. All these stories are enriched by dozens of archival and family photos, plus helpful notes in the margins that give extra information on the places and people mentioned. These additions greatly enhance the informative quality of the book while also facilitating easy reading.

In addition to the main chapters, the book also includes some excellent front and back matter that strongly enriches the text. Among the introductory pages, the editor’s note is particularly useful; it explains how and why characters may be referred to by a variety of names in the text, including section (skin group) names,
kinship terms and personal names. This is followed by a list of 13 of the book’s key characters, with a photo and brief biography for each one. Importantly, this part also notes each person’s skin group, as well as any additional names Minyjun uses when referring to that person. This section prepares readers for the main chapters by introducing them to the important players in Minyjun’s life, while of course also proving useful for reference while reading. The front matter also includes four maps detailing various regions relevant to the story.

The back matter, in turn, comprises four appendices, a bibliography and an index for the English text. Appendix 1 provides an unusually thorough introduction to Nyangumarta naming conventions and kinship terms, going far beyond the standard skin group diagrams. It expands upon the editor’s note at the beginning, explaining that an Aboriginal person may be known by a variety of names, including a traditional family name, a name associated with their place of birth or with a significant plant or animal, and a ‘whitefella’ name assigned by Europeans in the community. It goes on to explain that people may also be referred to by their skin group, by reference to their other family members (eg, ‘so-and-so’s father’), by their place in the birth order among their siblings, and by kinship terms that reveal how they are related to the speaker and/or others under discussion. This is followed by a list of singular, dyadic and tri-relational kin terms and their meanings, along with a discussion of moieties (generational, matrilineal and patrilineal).

As mentioned before, Appendices 2 and 4 explain the orthographic and stylistic choices employed throughout the Nyangumarta text. Appendix 2 provides a pronunciation guide and Appendix 4 gives additional notes on spelling and punctuation, including an explanation for the treatment of English loan words. Appendix 3 is a glossary, largely comprising placenames used in the story.

One of the most valuable elements of *Kurlumarniny* is the abundance of cultural information it shares with readers. For example, Minyjun describes multiple Law (initiation) ceremonies (as on pp. 89, 129, 171–173), relates Dreamtime stories (as on pp. xvii, 9, 61, 195) and tells about bereavement customs (p. 139). Even aside from these explicit descriptions of ceremony and beliefs, however, this book is replete with implicit cultural information about daily activities like hunting and cooking (as on pp. 65–67, 175, 191), remote travel and vehicle repair (as on pp. 45, 147, 163-167) and the customs associated with a highly communal style of living, such as centrally collecting and distributing pension money (pp. 129, 203). This is the type of knowledge that Minyjun wanted to preserve through writing this book, and this is the book’s real gift; such information will give readers, both Nyangumarta and non-Nyangumarta alike, an invaluable look into the tenets and practices of Minyjun’s community.

The one concern I can raise about *Kurlumarniny* is that the vignettes it is comprised of do not always weave together into a cohesive whole. Each chapter is made up of multiple short stories, usually no more than a page or two each in length. This discontinuous style means that central themes can get lost among the details of the many individual anecdotes. The problem is ameliorated, though, by the
introductions that are provided before each chapter, which help create a sense of continuity; furthermore, the notes in the margins assist readers in making connections among the various stories. In the end, this concern does not detract from the book’s overall value and appeal; Kurlumarniny remains an outstanding addition to the field of bilingual Indigenous literature.

Kurlumarniny was launched at a celebration in Karntimarta (Warralong) community, Minyjun’s home, in May 2012. Appropriately, the community’s newest school building was officially opened on the same day – another branch of the Strelley Community School system to which Minyjun dedicated so many years of his time and effort. In more ways than one, the day marked a culmination of his life’s work.

Sadly, Minyjun’s funeral was held in nearby Strelley community almost exactly a year later. People from around Australia, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, attended or sent messages remembering this thoughtful and dedicated leader. We can all be thankful that he lived to see the completion of his exceptional book, and that he was able celebrate its publication and present it to us himself – one last gift from a very gifted man.

Reference


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Learning Spaces: Youth, Literacy and New Media in Remote Indigenous Australia

Learning Spaces takes a new look at youth, literacy and new media in remote Indigenous communities. Kral and Schwab start the book by stating that they will dispute the current commonly presented view that the future of Indigenous youth is bleak (p. 2). Through a collaborative ethnographic research approach Learning Spaces explores how early school leavers (16+) and young adults (post school age) extend their learning and literacy skills through innovative use of technology.

The book is illustrated with colourful speech blocks that include quotes from participants, images of various learning spaces and of people learning in them. It is a short book based on a research project undertaken by the authors. Kral and Schwab argue that learning spaces in remote communities are important for Indigenous youth’s cultural and linguistic identity, and that such places help to develop youth’s literacy, or multiple literacies, as well as the more general and workplace skills such as organisation, language, confidence, initiative and problem-solving skills.

Learning Spaces opens with a forward by Professor Shirley Brice Heath, an anthropological linguist, who argues that the book ‘reminds us that envisioning change primarily through formal education will increasingly limit human potential’ (p. x). This book certainly encourages its readers to rethink how and where learning takes place.

In this book, learning spaces are spaces for learning that do not include institutional or formal learning places, such as primary and high schools and adult learning centres. Rather, they are non-formal spaces youth can use to extend their learning: spaces outside the school in remote areas where youth can hang out, mess around and geek out (Itô et al 2010). Learning spaces are existing sites within a community that can be used for ‘situated learning and productive activity’ (p. 30). Kral and Schwab argue that the physical space ‘is not as important as the productive learning’ that takes place in that space. These spaces provide informal learning, apprenticeship and voluntary specialisation development. High levels of technological competence are not generally needed as the skills are acquired through observation, imitation and practice. The spaces give people ‘the first step in gaining independent, non-directed computer experience and problem solving confidence’. High degrees of reading, writing and teamwork skills are embedded. Additionally, high-level thinking and analysing skills are developed, and, the authors argue, such skills often lead youth to work or further study.

Through international and national literature various concepts of learning and learning spaces are explored in Chapter 3, including questions of the evolution of learning: is it ‘learning to be’ or ‘learning to become’ (p. 50)? The discussion on
learning explores the relationship between school-based learning and learning socialisation. This is a fascinating chapter making links between the two, and argues that ‘in addition to instruction in school, it is ongoing out of school social practice across a life span that determines competence’ (p. 48). Learning spaces certainly do not replace but complement school-based learning. Bringing the two together can only be of benefit for remote Indigenous Australians.

Kral and Schwab argue that learning is a process of shaping and reshaping oneself, that is creating and shaping one’s identity; but this does not just happen. Chapter 4 clearly identifies eight important principles needed for designing quality, productive learning spaces. This chapter also answers some of the practical design questions that seemed unclear in the previous chapters. For example, up to here it was not clear whether the Indigenous youth using these spaces required or received guidance from a teacher or someone else. But it is clear in the Design Principles that a ‘mentor expert’ is needed to assist the youth when they are not sure of the next step or just to get them going. Design Principle 3 outlines the skills and practices required of the mentor expert whilst emphasising that learning is between the two rather than top down. The mentor needs to be passionate and collaborative and have the ability to teach complex technical skills but only when appropriate. In these spaces learning is project-based rather than assessment driven. In addition, the authors argue that the mentor needs to respect and be interested in the community’s language and culture and have an ongoing relationship with it.

Developing youth literacy is an important aspect of learning spaces. Literacy is acquired in situ in creative ways to support participants with low literacy skills. ‘Interest-driven engagement in projects and activities’ (p. 40) is the best way to learn; such interests help to develop literacy, not only in the written word but also in voice and film. Kral and Schwab also argue that learning spaces generate and demonstrate learning in the younger generations by the youth allowing younger people to watch them, and learn the skill before trying it for themselves.

Social media is not learning media but personalised learning. Learning Spaces emphasises that learning takes place at the pace of the learner through trial and error and practise because participants are interested and choose to learn the particular skill. There is evidence that the skills learned, as with all skills, are transferable to other areas/disciplines – that is general capacity building – and have led many to employment or enterprises within and outside the youth’s home community – though this was not an outcome intended by the project. The accompanying appendices provide valuable supporting resources. Appendix 1 provides a good list of national and international relevant websites, and Appendix 2 provides useful tips for expert mentors to use to help support participants’ language and literacy when working in these spaces or with computer digital devices.

In Learning Spaces, Kral and Schwab do indeed dispute the current commonly presented view that the future of Indigenous youth is bleak. They do this through demonstrations of out-of-school learning tools and techniques that
enable positive, culturally appropriate and relevant learning contexts. So I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in innovative learning through the use of technology.

Reference


Jo Caffery

University of Canberra
This book is a fascinating and absorbing biography of a man who should be widely recognised as a leading Australian Aboriginal rights activist. It reconstructs the life of Anthony Martin Fernando an Aboriginal man who, deeply disturbed by the treatment and condition of Aboriginal people in Australia, took his grievances to the world stage. Paisley describes him as a political envoy who, in exposing Australian conditions, appealed to the world in a variety of forums in England and across Europe for their intervention in Aboriginal affairs. He wanted their help to push for a morally reformed and responsible Aboriginal administration in Australia answerable to the global community. Such a story, the depth of Fernando’s despair and the length and breadth of it, is an evocative saga. In its telling Paisley recreates important parts of the war and interwar world. It is a gritty story of the late nineteenth century brutal (and brutalising) Australian frontier, a divided Europe shaped by shards of race hate, impoverished urban pockets where itinerant workers, like Fernando, scratched out meagre existences or got caught up in the logistics of state-sanctioned disciplinary regimes. And there are glimpses of humanity not least in the two English men who housed, employed and looked after him intermittently till his death in 1949.

It is not just Fernando’s mobility that has transgressive effects in this complex mix, but his outsideness. While Paisley is at pains to demonstrate his fit with a wider national and global indigenous and Afro-American political movement, particularly around the ports and wharfs of the bustling imperial metropolis and its colonial peripheries, Fernando remains the lone protestor, as the title of the book suggests. The question of what his story can offer Aboriginal, Australian, imperial or world history for that matter hovers around the contours of its telling. As an Aboriginal man devoted to the Aboriginal cause, how does Fernando’s life illuminate the story of black-white relations both in Australia and outside of it? Although Paisley does not specifically ask this question her book provides a number of possibilities.

Anthony Martin Fernando was born in Wolloomooloo, Sydney, in 1864. He was taken from his mother as a child and raised by white missionaries, so Paisley surmises, ending up on the rough north-western mining frontier of Western Australia by his fifties. It was there that he witnessed police brutality to Aboriginal people and, barred a fair hearing, took to the world to expose Aboriginal conditions. Paisley maps his journey as a series of performances in London and throughout Europe, including Turkey and Rome, from 1913 to 1942, when he was finally committed to Claybury Hospital in Essex, London, aged and unwell. At every turn he uses his situation to advertise the Aboriginal condition in Australia, even during a period of internment in Austria in 1916. Some of his most dramatic performances were in London itself: his street protests outside
Australia House or at speaker’s corner in Hyde Park. Even during his three separate trials for assault in the Old Bailey between 1929 and 1938, he uses the courtroom as a stage to protest conditions in Australia.

Like a needy child seeking attention Fernando’s performances constantly rehearsed his sense of grievance. He was willing the world for change. Believing firmly in British culpability for Aboriginal demise what he ultimately wanted was international intervention in Australia. He imagined an international commission overseeing the management of Aboriginal Australians and reminding the world of British wrongdoing and incapacity for mandatory power over both Australia and any future colonies.

The book demonstrates what a world away Australia was from both Fernando’s crusade and the European world on which it was staged. But not completely. His ‘call for help from Australia’ to the people of Switzerland, via the Der Bund newspaper elicited some hostile responses which were echoed wherever Aboriginal claims to justice and fair play were made in Australia. His attempts to raise the issue before Catholics in Rome raised deep suspicion and hostility despite a Vatican exhibition celebrating Catholic missions which largely supported his conclusions of genocide in Australia’s colonial history. And his accusations of genocide in Australia outside Australia House in London saw a hostile response from the Australian rector of St Clement’s church opposite who had organised a patriotic Anzac Day service on the same day.

While the hard lines of race literally shaped his existence they also shaped those around him. Threaded through the book is the story of Fernando’s encounter with Mary Bennett, a leading advocate for Aboriginal rights in Australia and England. Alerted by her friends in the humanitarian network of Fernando’s impending trial, she visited him while he was awaiting trial at the Old Bailey in 1929. She was deeply moved by him and his story of loss and dislocation. She not only shared Fernando’s angst about Aboriginal people, she shared much of his vision for redress. Like him she was an internationalist. Like him she was advocating for self-administered and governed Aboriginal reserves, equal citizenship, education and legal equality. Paisley surmises that Bennett’s meeting with Fernando fuelled her own crusade for Aboriginal rights. Indeed, if Fernando died without redress his cause lived on in Bennett’s own lifelong efforts, in Australia, defending Aboriginal human rights.

The focus of the book is Fernando himself. Yet, the small handful of friends, supporters and humanitarians who were on his side, have a shadowy presence in the story. Two, in particular, stand out – Frank Crawshaw and Douglas Jones – who not only employed him but also intervened to help him at critical times. Without their constancy and support, as well as the assistance and knowledge of their descendants shared with Paisley herself, Fernando’s story would still not be properly known. Indeed, without their help one wonders what would have become of him. Yet, we know very little of them or their particular stories or investments, except in Fernando himself, by the end of the book. I finished the story and had many questions about them, particularly Douglas Jones who was
a consistent supporter and friend to Fernando, apparently without paternalism or charity. In the world Paisley describes he was a rare beast but who was he and from where did such empathy spring?

Paisley makes the point in her acknowledgements that in writing the book she had to go beyond the usual limits of Aboriginal, Australian or British imperial history. This refers to the stretch of her own historical research as she tried to etch in, and make sense of, the story of Fernando’s life. I found this one of the great contributions of the book. Paisley digresses throughout to explain how Fernando’s story fits with myriad, often untold threads, of global history from policing in Fascist Italy to the medical examination of prisoners in Brixton, to the consumerist market culture of interwar Britain. Furthermore, at key moments in the book she fills in gaps in the story, Fernando’s origins, as expressed in his name, being the most obvious. While closely linked to his Catholicism she suspects South Asian background. This is less a story of ‘what if’ than ‘perhaps’. For some of her questions there are no clear answers such is the fragmentary nature of his life and the scattered archives on which it is based.

Yet the story Paisley weaves is anything but fragmentary. It is handsomely produced. The timeline at the beginning usefully plots, both temporally and geographically, Fernando’s journey. There are a series of wonderful black and white photographs in the book which also provide graphic detail and representation for the story. Many are referential. Included among them are images of Woolloomooloo and Peak Hill in Western Australia around the time Fernando lived there, photographs of concentration camp internees, key pieces of architecture central to the story and examples of Fernando’s own diary entries.

In the final analysis it was Fernando’s atypicality which makes his story important and suggestive as Paisley knows. His story works as a relief capable of throwing light on events at a critical time in world history, a sort of back-door view of the world. It was his capacity to slip through not only the hard edges of the early twentieth century world but through the historiography, too, which makes his story so powerful. As Paisley reflects, he has remained virtually unknown for decades. Thanks to her painstaking efforts and those of her researchers his anonymity is no more and we must all reflect a little harder, as Fernando implored, about the consequences of Australia’s imperial legacy.

Alison Holland
Macquarie University
I did not want to write this review. I did not want to read this book. I could not make myself read the details of the sexual abuse suffered by small children contained within its pages; it was too horrifying, too upsetting. Child sexual abuse is a difficult topic to talk about; it is a difficult topic to write about; it is a difficult topic to read about. And it is even more difficult, it seems, when the abuse is happening in Aboriginal communities.

Why is child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities so difficult to talk about? We should be shouting about it; we should be screaming and yelling and demanding that it stop. But we are not.

As Hannah McGlade explains in her confronting book *Our Greatest Challenge: Aboriginal Children and Human Rights*, child sexual abuse is very difficult for the victims and their families to talk about – for all sorts of reasons, including: intimidation, shame, powerlessness, and normalisation. Tragically, many Aboriginal girls ‘simply accepted that they would be sexually abused’ (p. 98). Others do not expect to be believed. Those who do tell, and whose cases get taken through the criminal justice system, have such a low expectation of success that it serves as a disincentive to others to speak out.

Non-Indigenous people do not talk about it for other reasons. There was a flurry of media interest and outraged/ill-informed commentary following the release of the ‘Little Children are Sacred Report’ in 2007, but the failure of the Northern Territory Emergency Response to adequately address the problem of child sexual abuse has gone largely unremarked. Disinclination to interfere in something that is incorrectly viewed as ‘cultural’, or an ‘Aboriginal problem’, may help to explain the deafening silence from the non-Indigenous community on this issue, but that is only part of the reason. The real reason we do not talk about it is because we do not want to know about it, because knowing about it and not doing anything to stop it makes us monsters.

Settler Australians have a long history of not listening to stories about Aboriginal oppression and abuse; white and black activists have always struggled to make non-Indigenous people hear about the atrocities suffered by Aboriginal people. Child sexual abuse is the latest horrifying example in a long list of horrifying examples. By not acting to protect Aboriginal children from sexual abuse – regardless of the race of the perpetrator – we are actively discriminating against them, and denying them their human rights.

As McGlade’s study makes clear, the current epidemic of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities is directly attributable to the trauma of colonisation, violent dispossession, family disruption, and ongoing racial discrimination. And we have known about it for more than ten years. McGlade analyses a decade
of government reports and inquiries – one could also look at Christine Choo’s 1990 report *Aboriginal Child Poverty* sponsored by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.

A Noongar woman, victim-survivor of child sexual abuse, human rights lawyer, and doctor of philosophy, McGlade brings a wealth of personal, professional, and academic expertise and insight to this most difficult of subjects. Seeking solutions from outside Australia, she draws inspiration and ideas from the United States and Canada, arguing that any future Australian responses must be based on the empowerment of women and children; must be developed from the ‘grassroots’ by communities; and must be in close cooperation with the criminal justice system. It must also have the support of the entire Australian nation.

Rani Kerin

The Australian National University
At first sight, possibly because of the back cover blurb and the opening lines of the introduction, one expects the book to be a new biography of the Reverend Lancelot Edward Threlkeld in his role as Missionary to the Aborigines at Lake Macquarie from 1825 to 1841. Although Threlkeld is the main character Anna Johnston insists that her work is neither biography nor history but a literary/cultural study. Be that as it may, I would argue that it is history and it is good history.

For the last 40 years colonial, imperial and cross-cultural historical studies have been dominated by the literary theorists and references to Foucault, Said and their contemporaries are almost mandatory in the historical literature. Johnston is really in this same historical tradition despite her claim to examine the archive ‘as a set of writing and reading practices, seeking to make different meanings than a historian might’. Of course she has in her sights historians with selective vision such as Henry Reynolds and Keith Windschuttle.

The ‘Paper War’ was Threlkeld’s own term for the bitter controversies he had with the directors of the London Missionary Society (LMS) – who first employed him at Lake Macquarie – the Reverend Samuel Marsden and the Reverend Dr John Dunmore Lang, involving him in public disputes and a libel case. Johnston extends the term to take in the paper archive that resulted.

The book has an introduction on colonial archives and textuality, five main chapters, a brief conclusion, a select bibliography, 39 pages of detailed notes and references and a comprehensive index. Each chapter is set in a colonial context. The first chapter, ‘Colonial Morality’, introduces the main players, Threlkeld himself, the Reverend Daniel Tyerman and his lay colleague George Bennet of the LMS who approved the mission, Marsden and Lang, and the two British Quakers, James Backhouse and George Washington Walker, who were caught up in the Paper Wars as observers and witnesses.

The second chapter, ‘Colonial Linguistics’, is concerned with Threlkeld’s pioneering work on the Awabakal language and how it was understood and used. The missionary’s linguistic work has always been regarded as his greatest achievement. Johnston appears to recognise this though throughout the book she is overly aware of what she sees as Threlkeld’s academic limitations. Anyone studying his linguistic work should begin with the LMS director Samuel Greatheed and the early missionary linguistic work in Polynesia.

Chapter 3, ‘Colonial Press’ takes us right into the Paper Wars. The narrative focuses on the harrowing story of Tommy, an Aboriginal prisoner, who was hanged in 1827 and attended by both Threlkeld and Lang. The attempt by a Catholic priest to baptise Tommy on the scaffold drew forth an angry
correspondence in the press with Threlkeld writing as Spectator in the Sydney Gazette, to be followed by five more letters early in 1828 designed to expose the ‘heresies’ of the Catholic church. In a three-cornered correspondence that ensued Lang and Threlkeld became sparring partners, Lang identifying Spectator as ‘that well-known Missionary to the Aborigines, who has expended upwards of £2000 in forming a petty settlement, at Reid’s Mistake’ and making a snide allusion to his former acting career.

Chapter 4, ‘Colonial Respectability’, discusses Threlkeld’s embarrassing plight in 1828 when the LMS refused to honour his bills, wrongly accusing him of extravagance and presumably resenting his independent stance. Threlkeld’s published Statement in defence of his position is analysed as well as Threlkeld’s libel case against Lang in 1836 after Lang had published three articles on ‘Missions to Aborigines’ in his own newspaper The Colonist which were scornful and defamatory. The outcome of this case was seen as a Pyrrhic victory for Threlkeld as Lang was to pay one farthing damages.

Chapter 5, ‘Colonial Legality’, also involves the courts but it is the section of the book that is most concerned with Aboriginal issues such as the appropriateness of British law, the place of customary law, the use of Aboriginal evidence and the question of sovereignty. One question that is not comfortably resolved is the non-baptism of Biraban and presumably other Aboriginal people who were nominal Christians, who could have given evidence if baptised.

The question went deeper than Tommy’s case. The baptism question had split the Society Islands mission where Threlkeld had worked previously. The LMS had allowed individual missionaries to pursue the practices of their own churches. Some of the Calvinistic Methodist missionaries (including Threlkeld’s great friend John Williams) were prepared to baptise anyone who asked; those of Dissenting background regarded baptism as the first stage of church membership requiring impeccable character. In Tahiti the whole national conversion process had been delayed because the missionaries refused to baptise King Pomare II because of his drunken bouts and his homosexual behaviour. However, he did get baptised and was accepted as an antinomian though not admitted to church membership. No doubt Threlkeld would never have baptised Pomare whom he loathed just as he would never baptise Biraban whom he loved because his friend was frequently drunk. Although the Aboriginal mission came under Church of England control presumably more liberal Anglicans felt obliged to respect Threlkeld’s uncompromising position. It would be interesting to know if Biraban ever asked for baptism.

The Paper War is well-written and well-researched and is, as the blurb confirms, an ‘engaging and intelligent book’. While the unifying theme is exploring and interpreting the paper archive, Johnston has a professional interest in contemporary colonial studies and the networking theories of the British empire and humanitarianism. As a historian trained before the literary/cultural revolution I find the intrusion of the names of contemporary scholars
in a historical narrative somewhat anachronistic but Johnston’s references are all pertinent and deftly done. To bury the names in remote endnotes would be inconvenient which rather justifies including contemporary names in the text.

Johnston suggests that her methodology is different from that of historians in regard to how documents come to be created but I doubt if this is so. Source criticism should always be a vital part of the historian’s approach. We should look at the documents in much the same way as she does except that, traditionally, the historian regarded this work as ‘homework’ and did not share it with his or her readers.

Because The Paper War is so well conceived and insightful I would like my comments to be taken as an alternate point of view rather than as criticism. Johnston resorts to social class and the Church/Chapel social divide as explaining most of the issues. While class was an undeniable factor the other two important factors in the breakdown of relationships were personalities and denominationalism (as distinct from the Church/Chapel divide).

Applying modern class terms to the past can be misleading. To see Threlkeld described as ‘a working-class British subject’ when he was the product of training designed to remove all traces of a working-class background seems a little anachronistic and that was why I prefer the term ‘mechanic class’ used by that incipient lower-middle class for themselves. Certainly some of the first LMS missionaries were working class, and as their critics said, ‘could not look a gentleman in the face’. But Threlkeld could look a gentleman in the face.

I do not take Lang’s jibes against Threlkeld too seriously as he had a somewhat warped personality and a penchant for malicious satire. His nasty unpublished satirical attacks on Marsden and the whole body of colonial clergy were far worse than anything he wrote about Threlkeld. The two missionaries to the Aborigines, William Walker and Threlkeld got off comparatively lightly – ‘Good grants of land, good flocks of sheep & good herds of cattle, are very good things after all for a zealous Missionary to the Aborigines’ (Fragment, Lang Papers, National Library of Australia). Any connection with trade was seen as self-aggrandisement and in Lang’s view, only men with university degrees should be conducting missions, yet he did have Threlkeld on his committee to supervise the German mission at Moreton Bay.

In the relationship with Marsden it is true that Threlkeld and Lang both thought Marsden was anti-chapel and had persecuted the LMS missionary William Pascoe Crook when he attempted to found a Congregational church in Sydney in 1810. While it was true that Marsden saw no need for a chapel in his parish he would not have interfered had not the Governor demanded it. Both Lang and Threlkeld wrote about the suppression and it appears to have been the initial cause of the breakdown of relationships.

None of the disputes make proper sense without taking into account the rise of denominationalism from around 1811 with the formation of the Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty to the repeal of the Test and
Corporation Acts in 1828. Many of the LMS missionaries nurtured in an eclectic Calvinistic Methodism were converted to the new political Nonconformity. Threlkeld, who had been a field preacher for the Vicar of Hatherleigh, and Crook declared themselves Congregationalists and the influence of these men became a disrupting factor both at home and in the mission field.

The almost fanatical embrace of Dissent had an adverse effect on personality. Threlkeld was described as one of the ‘perpetual blisters’ on the LMS in 1832 and the others were significant. With their new-found freedom and zeal for reform these men were seen as trouble-makers by the establishment. Historian Coupland blamed them for stirring up hostility to the Boers in South Africa and John Smith in the West Indies became a martyr when he died in prison in 1824 for his presumed role in the slave revolt in Demerara. These men were models for Threlkeld to emulate. The LMS itself also fell victim to the rise of denominationalism and became a predominantly Congregationalist organisation. Tyerman and Bennet represented the two sides struggling for hegemony within the LMS.

While this review concentrates largely on the participants in the Paper War a large part of the book concerns Aboriginal issues particularly in relation to the evolution of the law. Johnston is even handed in her approach though occasionally allows herself to be influenced by politically correct secondary sources rather than ‘the tradition of the elders’. Biraban was after all a man of high degree schooled by the wise men of an earlier generation.

The Paper War deserves to be widely known. Like another Aboriginal history classic, The Lamb Enters the Dreaming by Robert Kenny (Scribe 2010), it deserves better quality presentation. The paper cover with its deliberate dog-eared appearance may be symbolic but it does not have market appeal. The illustrations (mostly portraits) are adequate but John Fraser’s linguistic map (fig. 23) is really too cramped to be useful and the print is too small to read.

Niel Gunson

The Australian National University
During the late 18th and early 19th century, small groups of European men from the maritime industry established depots along the remote southern Australian coast to service merchant vessels that infrequently passed through. These were men who shunned mainstream society, running small farms and living seasonally as sealers with their Aboriginal wives, who hunted and laboured for them. For these small communities, outside goods were provided from trade with passing ships, which in turn picked up seal and kangaroo skins, salt, and whale bone. The Aboriginal people living here were an important component in the colonial economic growth of the region. The earliest phase of European settlement in many parts of southern Australia was haphazard, and in terms of colonial government it was unsanctioned. In this environment, few records remain to accurately document its growth, and there are many conflicting accounts concerning the identities of the Europeans and Indigenous people who were involved.

In *Roving Mariners*, Lynnette Russell uses the tools of an historian/anthropologist by examining captain’s logs, ship’s records, journals of sailors, government records and museum artefacts to produce an in-depth account of the lives and adventures of Indigenous people caught up in the maritime industry of the southern oceans. Russell’s intellectual starting point is the fact that for most Indigenous people in Australia the impact of colonialism was brutal – involving dispossession of land, relocation, devastating diseases, murder and institutionalisation. From here the author considers a major exception in the southern coastal region, and describes just how a select few Aboriginal people in Tasmania managed to survive the harshness of the frontier and become well-established individuals as whalers and sealers.

Chapter 1 commences with a description of the maritime industry, while Chapter 2 concerns the Aboriginal cultural relationships with whales. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with examples of Indigenous people who left a record, such Tommy Chaseland, William Lanné, Henry Whalley, Walter George Arthur, who worked as sealers and whalers. Chapters 5 and 6 deal with cross-cultural relationships and the history of colonial and race relationships. Chapter 6 considers the physical evidence that speaks of Indigenous involvement with the southern maritime industry, from the mementos that whaling ship captains collected and lodged in their homes, to an adze found on Kangaroo Island that had been made from a 19th century telegraph insulator. In the case of the ‘hybrid’ objects, that is hunter-gatherer implements made from European materials, Russell has continued her archaeological work (Russell 2005) and proposed that they are from a ‘hybrid or creolised community’ (p. 139).
The bibliography of Roving Mariners shows that the author has published widely in the areas of social theory, Indigenous histories, post-colonialism and representations of race, museum studies and popular culture (ie Russell 2001, 2005). This eclectic background has her well-equipped for the subject of her book. Russell examines her personal reactions to the power of objects in museums. She describes recently visiting a new Aboriginal display in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, and unexpectedly encountering here William Lanné’s tobacco pipe in a glass case. She explains that she

was overwhelmed by the simplicity, the humanity, and the utter recognisability of the item and, by extension, its owner. With this viewing the personhood of William Lanné, whose body is often described in terms of his being ‘the last Tasmanian “full blood male,” asserted itself into my conscience from where I have been unable to dislodge it (p. 91).

Roving Mariners is no bland academic text. Russell uses the classic fictional book, Moby-Dick, by Herman Melville (1851) to help set the scene for her description of 19th century life in the maritime industry.

Among the main strengths of Roving Mariners is the insight it gives into the backgrounds of the individuals who are caught up in the history being written. While other readers may be struck by the lives of other people she documents, for me it was Whalley that left the greatest impression. From my own research, this man was probably the son of the European sealer known as Whalley (Henry Wallen) and of Aboriginal woman Martha, originally from Port Lincoln in South Australia and living among the sealers based on Kangaroo Island prior to official settlement (Clarke 1998: 46). With money gained from the trade in skins, his father sent the young Henry Wallen junior to Hobart Town, where he received an education. He was later employed as a cabin boy on a brig, where he was called ‘Black-Harry’. Henry eventually became a whaler, taking one of the names of his father, ‘Whalley’. Henry knew William Lanné, and was a pallbearer at his funeral in 1869. Henry Wallen Junior died near Macquarie Island on 6 August 1877 as the result of an accident when the whaling vessel, the Bencleugh was caught in a storm.

Russell’s account of Whalley family history differs slightly from my own, as it has him as the son of a Tasmanian Aboriginal woman known as Betty or Bet. She believes that he was William Lanné’s cousin. Due to the lack of precise records for the sealing period and to the uncertainty of genealogical research based on oral records, we may never know Whalley’s exact parentage. Russell provides an outline of his character, and by drawing heavily upon written records she documents Whalley’s rise to prominence in the maritime world in which he became a respected whaler, harpooner and first-mate. Whalley’s shipmates cared for him when mortally wounded, by getting him off the ship and into one of the huts on Macquarie Island, left vacant during the offseason for sealing. He died here and was then buried between the ribs of a ship wrecked there
earlier. As Russell declares ‘Whalley died not a half-caste or descendant of an Aboriginal mother but as he lived, as a whaler and sealer. His obituary stated he was a “mariner.”’ (p. 90).

Another major strength of *Roving Mariners* is what it adds to Australian history as a whole. By focusing on the ‘mixed’ communities of whalers and sealers, the book challenges assumptions about possible gaps between Aboriginal and European Australian histories. Given the fact that there are thousands of Indigenous people living today between Adelaide and Hobart who can trace their descent to sealers, both European and Aboriginal, the investigation of the history of this period is highly relevant. Russell’s work, which focuses chiefly on Tasmania, adds to the study by Rebe Taylor (2002) of the Indigeneity on Kangaroo Island. The detailed account of the niche economy for Aboriginal people of southern Australia bears some resemblance to what is described in northern Australia, where coastal Aboriginal groups interacted closely with the Macassans who arrived each year with the north-west monsoon to chiefly gather trepang (sea slug) for the Chinese market (Macknight 1976; Mitchell 1996). In both cases, the non-Aboriginal people arrived by sea, worked seasonally, employed Aboriginal people with relevant skills, and did not engage in missionising activities. Many of Russell’s findings may prove to be equally valid in this different landscape.

*Roving Mariners* is well written and enjoyable to read. The chosen graphics used to illustrate it include those of colonial paintings, historical photographs and maps, all of which are highly relevant. The book will become a classic in the Aboriginal history field.

**References**


Philip A Clarke

Griffith University
Ludwig Leichhardt is perhaps Australia’s best-known and most controversial explorer. Various places are named after him and he is the subject of a voluminous literature that ranges from strong support to scathing criticism. In 1844 and 1845, the young Prussian scientist with a boundless curiosity about Australia led an exploration party from Moreton Bay in Queensland to Port Essington in the Northern Territory for almost 5,000 kilometres through mostly uncharted country. He returned to a hero’s welcome in Sydney and won international recognition. Leichhardt’s second intended major expedition that commenced in late 1846 was less successful. Planning to travel from eastern Queensland to Swan River in Western Australia, he was forced to turn back in the middle of 1847. Some detractors both then and later questioned the value of his achievements and noted the explorer’s inability to get on with his companions. Leichhardt set out again for Swan River in 1848. After being last seen at a Darling Downs station in April that year, he and his six men disappeared somewhere in the Australian outback far from the frontiers of European settlement. The circumstances of that disappearance have never been satisfactorily explained in spite of countless attempts to do so.

Darrell Lewis is particularly well equipped to examine what he calls ‘this marvellous mystery’ (p. xxiv). An archaeologist, bushman and historian, Lewis has worked closely with Aboriginal people and other residents in the Northern Territory and elsewhere in remote Australia. Among his many publications on Territory history is the well received A Wild History: Life and Death on the Victoria River Frontier that appeared in 2012. Where is Dr Leichhardt? was researched and written while he was based at the National Museum of Australia’s Centre for Historical Research. Like A Wild History, his latest book is a groundbreaking work.

Lewis does not solve the Leichhardt mystery. Instead he forensically considers the history of various search expeditions (including his own), the validity of relics claimed to have Leichhardt associations and the different theories proposed to allow readers to reach their own conclusions on where Leichhardt went, where he died, how he died and where any surviving evidence of him might be. Material is logically organised in ‘regional clusters’ that ‘fall along the lines of the two routes Leichhardt is suggested to have taken – a northern arc across the continent and a direct east-west line’ (p. x).

Where is Dr Leichhardt? shows that while search parties found ‘L’ marked trees and a few items possibly belonging to Leichhardt’s expedition, the only authenticated artefact is a small brass plate marked ‘LUDWIG LEICHHARDT 1848’ discovered during the early twentieth century. The ‘evidence is strong’, Lewis contends, ‘that the plate was found … in the north-west Tanami near Sturt
Creek, and in turn this suggests that Leichhardt followed his stated plan [of how to reach Swan River] and made it at least two thirds of the way across the continent’ (p. 180).

This view is elaborated further in the important final chapter where Lewis proposes two reasons why Leichhardt planned to take the northern route. The first was the need for regular and large water supplies. The second was the powerful influence of the scientist Alexander von Humboldt, which meant that Leichhardt followed the longer route to Swan River in order to more accurately determine continental-scale biological and physical features.

Lewis also believes on the basis of Aboriginal evidence that at least some Leichhardt expedition members perished well south of Lake Gregory and that the explorers may have split into two groups, which could account for stories of white men living with Aborigines beyond the frontier and ‘about the massacre or perish of a party of white men’ (p. 377). He notes, though, that such evidence remains inconclusive and that arguments about where Leichhardt died ‘remain a matter of probabilities rather than certainties’ (p. 379). Lewis is justifiably dismissive of Dan Baschiera’s recent far-fetched claim that ‘the British’ deliberately poisoned all the expedition members after Leichhardt spoke about Aborigines having their own civilisation.

Lewis’s story involves ‘an amazing cast of characters – “wild” Aborigines, explorers, bushrangers, frontier squatters, prospectors, aristocrats, charlatans, clairvoyants, madmen, scientists, historians, “armchair experts” and others’ (pp. ix–x). They include well-known figures such as the explorers John Forrest and David Carnegie, and the politician Bill Grayden, who all searched for Leichhardt evidence. The most extraordinary of the characters was the charismatic ‘con man’ Andrew Hume, who falsely claimed to have discovered important Leichhardt relics and a survivor of Leichhardt’s party living with Aborigines during the 1860s and 1870s.

*Where is Dr Leichhardt?* presents immensely detailed results of massive research yet remains highly readable. As Henry Reynolds notes on the front cover, the suspense is maintained until the final pages. The book’s sources include a wide range of secondary materials, newspapers, periodicals, collections of personal papers and government records. Lewis’s deep first hand knowledge of northern Australia also informs his discussion. Footnotes are where they ought to be at the bottom of each page and there is a comprehensive bibliography. Excellent use is made of numerous images and maps.

There are only minor weaknesses. Many readers will probably need a little more background information on Leichhardt than that Lewis very briefly provides. He makes the questionable assumption that in ‘the national consciousness Leichhardt is, perhaps, second to Ned Kelly’ (p. ix). Although the book is generally well written, there are very occasional lapses such as ‘Years later he later claimed’ (p. 98) and ‘a man named Andrew Hume’ (p. 138).
Where is Dr Leichhardt? is a splendid addition to historical scholarship that deserves the wide readership for which it is intended. It is well designed and sturdily produced. There is much in it about European contacts with Aboriginal people and the use of Aboriginal accounts. Lewis convincingly and entertainingly tells a wonderful story but one that also provides perceptive observations about Leichhardt’s continuing role in the Australian imagination. Perhaps one day with the discovery of new evidence Leichhardt’s fate will be finally revealed. Until that happens, Lewis’s book is likely to remain the standard source on his disappearance.

David Carment
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Barbara Miller’s book *William Cooper Gentle Warrior* narrates the amazing story of an Aboriginal man’s fight against racial injustice, despite his not having any legal rights and being considered as equivalent to ‘flora and fauna’. Perhaps more extraordinary still, the book narrates Cooper’s willingness to speak out against the Third Reich’s persecution of Jews when most white Australians at the time remained silent or dismissive. Miller does a wonderful service in bringing attention to Cooper’s heroic tale spanning six decades of activism and protest. And in contrast to recent revelations that the Italian Giovanni Palatucci did not save thousands of Jews from death camps under the Third Reich (Poggiolo 2013), there is no doubt that William Cooper was the ‘real thing’. Miller’s moving historical account fills in missing gaps in the story of Indigenous activism within Australia, including her own participation in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, the book adds a significant new dimension to our understandings of indigenous politics on a global scale both pre and post World War Two. And perhaps most importantly, as discussed below, the account points to the intersections between Australia’s Indigenous and immigration policies or, to put it another way, its internal and external racial strategies. As Miller suggests, these issues are deeply connected. This insight underscores the book’s current relevance in thinking about problems on both internal and external fronts facing Australia – and other countries – in the early decades of the 21st century.

William Cooper was a stoic fighter and determined to speak out against the discriminations of his own people. Despite his family suffering enormous deprivation under white Australia’s colonial policies that included explicit directives of genocide, protectionism and assimilation, Cooper set out at an early age to bring attention to the plight of Australian Aborigines. Born in 1860 in Yorta Yorta country near Echuca on the Murray River, Cooper spent parts of his childhood on Daniel Mathews’ missionary station at Maloga where he was influenced by the churchman’s championing of Aboriginal rights. As a young man he lived at a government run station called Cummeragunga, usually abbreviated to ‘Cummera’. In his later years, at the age of 72, he was forced to leave Cummera and moved to a modest house in Footscray where he emerged as a leader amongst the urban disenfranchised Aboriginal community. There Cooper became increasingly involved in local organisations and political activism fighting for black equality in a white world.

As a founding member of the Australian Aborigines League in 1934, Cooper sought political representation of blacks in state and federal parliament (Attwood and Markus 2004). Acutely aware that Maoris in New Zealand had been granted political representation in parliament since 1867, Cooper demanded that Australian Aborigines be given similar political representation in what was coined a ‘New Deal’. Drafting a petition to the King of England, Cooper managed to obtain nearly 2,000 Aboriginal signatures by 1935 supporting the
demand ‘to prevent the extinction of the Aboriginal race’. This was a miraculous accomplishment given his limited financial resources and that signatures were obtained from remote communities across the country (p. 45). This petition also evidenced a growing ‘pan-Aboriginal consciousness’ that spoke of native unity in the face of severe adversity.

Unfortunately, the looming war helped defeat Cooper’s effort to have Britain grant political representation to native peoples, or at least provided the excuse not to pursue it. In 1938 Cooper turned his attention to domestic politics and demanded citizenship rights for blacks. He heavily campaigned against the 150th celebrations of Australia Day, calling the event a Day of Mourning. Cooper, along with fellow activists such as Jack Patten, Doug Nicholls and Bill Ferguson, formed a delegation and presented a petition outlining a 10 point plan to Prime Minister Lyons in Parliament House, Canberra. The government, however, denied the petition on the basis that native peoples were not subjects of Australia but of Britain pursuant to section 51 of the Constitution hence outside the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister. As Miller writes, ‘the Commonwealth Government had no authority to pass legislation at all for Aborigines. It could not therefore pass legislation giving them representation in Federal Parliament’ (p. 61). This point must have been exceptionally hard for Cooper to stomach given that his son had died in World War One fighting with the Australian forces yet could never be recognised as an Australian citizen.

The petition’s failure in 1938 to be even considered by the Australian government underlined the political reality at the time. Under the Constitution native peoples could not be considered citizens of the land they had occupied for thousands of years, unlike the British, Irish, and other immigrants who had been coming across the seas for the past 150 years. This explicit denial of legal recognition of Aboriginal peoples correlated with the country’s white Australia policy which sought to keep Australia ‘an outpost of the British race’ as expressed by Prime Minister John Curtin during World War Two. The denial of citizenship rights was a terrible blow to Cooper and the burgeoning pan-Aboriginal movement. Despite this setback, or perhaps because of this setback, Cooper aggressively protested Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, which occurred in Germany in November 1938 and left approximately 30,000 Jews incarcerated, over 1,000 synagogues destroyed, and at least 90 people dead. William Cooper led a delegation of the Australian Aborigines League to the German Consulate in Melbourne to deliver a petition which condemned the ‘cruel persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazi government of Germany, and asks that this persecution be brought to an end’. On 7 December 1938, The Argus newspaper reported that the Consulate refused the delegation admission.

What inspired Cooper to speak out in defense of Jewish refugees? Why, despite decades of setbacks in terms of fighting for Aboriginal rights, did Cooper rally

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1 This statement needs qualification. Before 1901 all inhabitants of colonial Australia, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were considered British citizens. However, with Federation in 1901 Aboriginal peoples were declared to remain British, not Australian citizens.
the energy to speak out on behalf of European minorities? An answer is offered in Cooper’s letter to the Minister of the Interior, written nine days after being refused admission at the German Consulate:

“We feel that while we are all indignant over Hitler’s treatment of the Jews, we are getting the same treatment here and we would like this fact duly considered…I would like to emphasis that what we are asking for the aboriginal born in Australia is already available to Chinese, Japanese, or other alien(s) if they happen to be born here’ (cited p. 212).

In other words, Cooper saw parallels between black and white racial oppression that others could or would not see and in desperation sought to broadcast his observation. It should be noted that Cooper’s public denunciation stands in stark contrast to the outcome of the Evian conference in July earlier that year. At this international meeting, Australian representative Mr TW White made it clear that Australia would not respond to the German crisis and accept Jewish refugees stating that ‘As we [Australia] have no real racial problem, we are not desirous of importing one...’ (cited p. 184).

Barbara Miller’s account of William Cooper and these turbulent years of emerging Aboriginal activism in the 1920s and 1930s is truly fascinating and offers what I see as three important insights. First, apart from reminding the reader of the commitment and agency of Indigenous leaders dedicated to fighting the deeply racist policies of the period, Miller’s narrative is a welcome reminder that black activism started well before the civil rights era of the 1960s and 1970s. In short, contrary to popular belief, the Australian black movement did not start with the 1962 amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918, 1967 Referendum, or 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra and related black mobilisation centered in Sydney’s suburb of Redfern. Rather, the civil rights movement in Australia was prefigured by earlier campaigns and protests that had long historical connections to British and United States anti-slavery movements. As Miller notes, William Cooper grew up on the Maloga mission in the 1870s to the sound of negro spirituals and the abolition rhetoric of Daniel Mathews. Moreover, the grandson of William Wilberforce, who is largely credited with ending slavery in Britain, spent some time living in Australia in the 1880s and is presumed to have had a relationship with Cooper’s mother and fathered some of his siblings (p. 25, 29, 69). Miller’s account brings to light elements of these startling overlapping histories of racial oppression and minority resistance within British settler societies.

Secondly, William Cooper Gentle Warrior underscores the global influences on domestic Indigenous politics in Australia. While the book is ostensibly about Cooper’s activism prior to his death in 1941, equal time is spent on Indigenous politics in the post World War Two era. In this period Miller points

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2 Drawing parallels between the plight of native peoples and Jews was not unique to William Cooper and one can see a similar move in the work of Felix Cohen, a Jew advocating for Native American rights (see Washburn 2009), and in the activism of black scholar WEB Du Bois and other pan-African organisations (see Darian-Smith 2012).
to the increasing international pressures that were brought to bear through such organisations and activists as the Black Panthers, Angela Davis, and the South African anti-Apartheid movement that together helped to dismantle the white Australia policy. For instance, the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement (FCAA) launched a huge media campaign to seek constitutional reform in the 1960s that would allow the federal government to legislate on behalf of Aborigines. In a FCAA meeting in Canberra in 1964 there were many Aboriginal delegates present as well as over 40 observers from the embassies of the United States, Canada, Soviet Union, Indonesia, Brazil, Burma and the Irish Republic (p. 93). The FCAA, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the United States, had learnt to aggressively seek international oversight over oppressive national policies. Specifically, these organisations turned to the laws of other countries as well as the collective authority of the United Nations as leverage for domestic legislative reform (see Darian-Smith 2012).

Thirdly, and this is what I see as truly innovative in this historical account, are the parallels and connections William Cooper made over 80 years ago between Australia’s policies toward immigrant refugees and its policies toward its domestic native communities. As Miller provocatively notes, ‘The White Australia Policy is usually thought of in terms of immigration but it also affected policy towards Aborigines. Why go to all that trouble to keep “coloured” races out of Australia and then have a growing group of mixed race within your own borders?’ (p. 150). This line of argument resists conventional sensibilities and offers an insightful historical lesson. So often indigenous politics – and indigenous studies in general – are contained within national borders and classified as domestic issues. But as I have argued elsewhere, a country’s policies toward its native peoples, and the place of those native peoples within the national polity, are constantly refracted through that country’s larger relationship with the rest of the world (Darian-Smith 2013). No nation-state operates as an island, no matter how often and determinedly the island rhetoric is mobilised. Hence immigration policies, and the acceptance of refugees into Australia (ie German Jews in the 1930s, Vietnamese in the 1970s, or ‘boat people’ in the 2010s) cannot be disentangled from domestic histories of anxiety about Aborigines and their relationship to mainstream society. However, analysts and academics of both indigenous and immigrant issues seem curiously determined to keep these arenas separated.

Barbara Miller’s *William Cooper Gentle Warrior* is a brave and wonderful book that should be read by all those interested in Australia’s recent history. It leaves me asking many questions about the past and future of Indigenous politics and more tangentially the interrelationship between native and immigrant laws and policies. Today in Australia, the island rhetoric has become a mantra that plays to a conservative political agenda and xenophobic sentiments. Perhaps not coincidently, the rising hysteria about ‘boat people’ comes at a time when one fifth of Australia is under Aboriginal ownership, and more and more Indigenous communities are capitalising on their mineral resources in what Marcia Langton
has called a ‘quiet revolution’ (Langton 2013). A troubling question raised in
my mind is the possible connection between on the one hand the heavy-
handed militarisation of the Northern Territory Intervention that clamps down
on Aboriginal rights, and on the other hand the increasingly shrill demands
for patrolling the nation’s island borders and incarcerating its refugees. Both
internal and external policies reinforce white paternalism and racial superiority,
and underscore white elites’ inability to fully embrace cultural and religious
diversity.

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John Maynard is a Worimi man from the Port Stephens region of New South Wales. He currently holds an ARC Australian Research Fellowship (Indigenous). He has held several major positions and served on numerous prominent organisations and committees including Director of the Wollotuka Institute of Aboriginal Studies at the University of Newcastle, Deputy Chairperson of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), Executive Committee of the Australian Historical Association, New South Wales History Council, Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC), Australian Research Council College of Experts, National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) and the NSW Fulbright Selection Committee. He was the recipient of the Aboriginal History (Australian National University) Stanner Fellowship 1996, the New South Wales Premiers Indigenous History Fellow 2003, Australian Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow 2004, University of Newcastle Researcher of the Year 2008 and 2012 and Australian National University Allan Martin History Lecturer 2010. He gained his PhD in 2003, examining the rise of early Aboriginal political activism. He has worked with and within many Aboriginal communities, urban, rural and remote. Professor Maynard’s publications have concentrated on the intersections of Aboriginal political and social history, and the history of Australian race relations. He is the author of several books, including Aboriginal Stars of the Turf (2002), Fight for Liberty and Freedom (2007) and The Aboriginal Soccer Tribe (2011). He has appeared on numerous television and radio programs including documentaries The Track, The Colony, Vote Yes for Aborigines, Captain Cook Obsession and Discovery, Outback United and Lachlan Macquarie – The Father of Australia.
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Footnote style

2. Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.
5. Solly to Stokell, 4 March 1869, AOTCSD 7/23/127.

Footnote numbers are placed after punctuation marks in the text. Please do not use ibid. or similar abbreviations, but repeat the short citation.

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