

9. The ‘Minutes of Evidence’ project: Creating collaborative fields of engagement with the past, present and future

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History for me is best understood when you take the words off the page and voice them. It is a reminder that all people have emotions and desires that drive our actions and words, which in turn creates our history, which in turn we hopefully learn from.

(Melodie Reynolds-Diarra, actor, *Coranderrk: We Will Show The Country*)

The preceding chapters of this collection demonstrate how nuanced and critically informed analyses of historical evidence can deepen and refine our understanding of nineteenth-century Victorian society. In this chapter, we seek a similar outcome; but we shift the focus towards the task of using historical materials to engage a broader public audience. In doing so we consider the potential benefits of expanding the field of engagement with the past through an innovative collaboration which aims to bring Victoria’s history ‘back to life’ through theatre; by (re)citing its historical archive, and taking the words ‘off the page’ and voicing them out loud, as Wongutha woman and actor Melodie Reynolds-Diarra puts it.

In this chapter, we discuss a recent project – the ‘Minutes of Evidence’ project¹ – that at once reflects and benefits from the comprehensive considerations and

¹ The ‘Minutes of Evidence project: Promoting new and collaborative ways of understanding Australia’s past and engaging with structural justice’, is funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage grant, with substantial support from 13 partner organisations. The broader research agenda draws on the 1881 Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the Aboriginal Reserve at Coranderrk to encourage greater awareness of the effects of settler colonialism in Victoria’s past and present and more open consideration of how to live together justly in the future. It examines how notions of justice have been formulated, invoked and confronted over time and place, and how the enduring legacies of past injustices continue into the present – despite official responses designed to redress them – so as to foster new ways of thinking about structural justice in the present and future. ‘Minutes of Evidence’ is a collaboration between researchers from the University of Melbourne and La Mama Theatre, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, Koorie Heritage Trust, Arts Victoria, Regional Arts Victoria, the State Library of Victoria, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI), the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and VicHealth, in association with researchers from Deakin University, the University of Sussex and Royal Holloway, University of London. The project is creating a number of ‘meeting points’ – in public spaces such as schools, on-Country, in theatres and in universities – to bring together leading Indigenous and non-Indigenous education experts, researchers,

professional skills that academic historians bring to their work. But the 'Minutes of Evidence' project is also a collaborative enterprise that sets out to expand the field of engagement with the notion and practice of history by creating a number of spaces where different ways of understanding Victoria's past and its resonance in the present can interact, and their implications unfold. Its members are Indigenous and non-Indigenous; it is interdisciplinary in its conceptual framing (sharing the insights of researchers in history, cultural geography, criminology, socio-legal studies and law); and cross-sectoral in composition (its partners come from the creative arts, education, major government and public institutions, and universities in Victoria and England).

As previous contributors have foreshadowed, to live in early twenty-first-century Victoria is to live with settler colonialism and, therefore, with the unfinished business between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that was produced by Britain's overarching imperial ambitions and the distinctive modes of settler governance it oversaw in the fledgling state. Accordingly, a key concern of the 'Minutes of Evidence' project is to direct the attention of a range of audiences – academic and non-academic, members of the public, educators and school children – not only to the specific nature of Victoria's foundations but also to the scope and significance of the broader empire in which Victoria was placed. In moving between the local and the global, and the past and the present, the project draws centrally on the concept of structural injustice to raise awareness of the particular historical experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples post-colonisation and of their enduring ramifications in the present. In so doing, it seeks to foster a more informed understanding of what structural justice might look like in Victoria, and Australia more generally. In reaching beyond Australia, it also opens spaces to consider the importance of accounting for history in justice projects in other contexts, such as post-conflict contexts in which there is a more sustained and holistic engagement with addressing the injustices of the past through so-called 'transitional justice' measures.²

At the heart of the project is the wish to extend the field of engagement with history itself. It seeks to draw on, yet move beyond, conventional scholarly ways of knowing; to draw in different perspectives on the meaning and

performance artists, community members, government and community organisations to promote new ways of publicly engaging with history and structural injustice through research, education and performance. In highlighting the significance of the 1881 Inquiry, 'Minutes of Evidence' has supported DEECD's production of innovative and collaborative curriculum modules and teaching resources for History and Civics & Citizenship in Victorian secondary schools and also presented a groundbreaking verbatim-theatre play *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country*, which brings to life the voices of Indigenous and European people who testified at the 1881 Coranderrk Inquiry. The project also supports research training for early-career Indigenous scholars: www.minutesofevidence.com.au.

2 Jennifer Balint, Julie Evans and Nesam McMillan, 'Rethinking transitional justice, redressing Indigenous harm: a new conceptual approach', *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 8(2), 2014: 194–216.

experiences of the past and the present; and to open up new possibilities for a more collaborative future. While the history of Victoria has much to say about the coercive and destructive nature of colonial governance it nevertheless demonstrates, too, that in the past, as much as the present, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples also shared concerns about justice, despite seemingly overwhelming pressures to consider their welfare and interests as separate. Through the mediums of performance, education and research – all premised on public and community engagement – the 'Minutes of Evidence' project seeks to pursue new ways of connecting the past and the present, as well as connecting contemporary audiences, school children, educators and readers with histories of colonialism and their enduring effects. In so doing, it presents opportunities for these communities to reflect on what justice and redress in such contexts may look like. In the first instance, the project brings together the skills and perspectives of its partners, and the engagement of local Aboriginal peoples and communities, to employ theatre as an initial focal point for engagement. *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country* is a verbatim theatre performance based on edited primary source materials – principally, the extracts from the official minutes of evidence of a government inquiry into conditions at an Aboriginal reserve near Healesville outside Melbourne that took place in 1881, together with excerpts of petitions, letters and newspaper articles from the time.³ The project then turns to developing models for community involvement, adapting the play for secondary schools, embedding project themes in resources to support the national curriculum, hosting public seminars and forums, and undertaking interdisciplinary research on the notion and practice of structural justice. As this piece goes to publication, the project is nearing the end of its third and final year of formal operation. Its preparation and development, however, began in 2009 as appropriate partners, models of collaboration, and, of course, avenues for funding were sought and established.⁴

3 *Report of the Board Appointed to Enquire into, and Report upon, the Present Condition and Management of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, together with the minutes of evidence*, John Ferres, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1882 [henceforth: *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*]. The performance history for *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country* is as follows: initial pilot and workshop, 13–15 August, 2010 (La Mama Courthouse Theatre, Melbourne); community consultation readings, 6 May 2011 (Melba Hall, The University of Melbourne) and 7 May 2011 (Sanctuary House, Healesville); public premiere season, 16–27 November 2011 (La Mama Courthouse Theatre); second season, 11–12 February 2012 (Indigenous Arts Festival, BMW Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne); third season, 28 June – 1 July 2012 (Playhouse Theatre, Sydney Opera House, Sydney). In 2013, the 'Minutes of Evidence' project together with ILBIJERRI Theatre Company developed a new version of the play, entitled *CORANDERRK*, targeted specifically at school audiences. Pilot readings were staged on 15–16 August at the Memorial Hall, Healesville, and at the Open Stage Theatre, The University of Melbourne. An annotated script of the production has now been published by the writers, Nanni, G & James, A, *Coranderrk: We Will Show The Country*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013.

4 Funding to support the development of the project was kindly received from the following bodies: The University of Melbourne (CCRAG Cultural & Community Grant; School of Social and Political Sciences Seed Grant); The City of Melbourne (Community Services Grant); with contributions from La Mama Theatre, VicHealth (Arts About Us Program) and KereKere. The official 'Minutes of Evidence' project itself was funded under an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (2011–2014) with funding and support from the following

This chapter focuses on the first phase of the project, which centred on the development and performance of the *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country* (henceforth *CWWSC*) production. We discuss the role of these performances, and the medium of verbatim theatre more generally in making history accessible to non-academic audiences, and therefore creating new opportunities for bringing history into the present. From our perspective, a key role of these performances is to provide a catalyst for the formation of a number of meeting spaces: firstly, between academic and non-academic audiences, who might share an immediate contact and intimacy with the voices of the archives – the raw materials in the writing and re-telling of history. The production's historical/theatrical method of bringing the past into the present can therefore help to not only spark public interest in the past but also create a shared historical consciousness in Australia. Secondly, *CWWSC* establishes a meeting space between the realms of the spoken and the written word – commonly understood as being the dominant measures of authenticity in Aboriginal and Western cultures, respectively. By honouring and invoking both the oral and written tradition of History, *CWWSC* thus essentially creates an opportunity for a broader, shared space to emerge between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal audiences. The story that is told takes both the audience and performers on a journey that connects the present to the past through the shared experience of theatre, creating a third meeting space for acknowledgement and possible change. It is through the recognition of the structural injustice of the governance of Aboriginal people in the past, and its echoes into the present, that there may be collaboration on what is needed for structural change in the present and future. The recognition of the injustice heard, and acknowledged, by the inquiry, and the resurrection of this buried legal record through the medium of theatre in the present, may act as a catalyst for new public discussions about structural injustice in Australia – and elsewhere – leading to new conversations about what structural justice may look like and demand.

We begin by outlining the unique and remarkable history on which *CWWSC* is based, a history that highlights the injustice perpetrated against the Coranderrk community, but also its resistance, agency and partnership with non-Aboriginal peoples in its struggle for justice against the settler colonial state. The brief historical introduction which follows does not seek to offer a detailed account of Coranderrk or Victorian history (for this readers may wish to consult preceding chapters of this collection). Rather, it aims to highlight some of the key themes and events that are central to the subsequent discussion concerning the performance and the way in which it capitalises on both the power of theatre and the authenticity of the archive in order to raise awareness of the history

partners: The University of Melbourne, La Mama Theatre, ILBIJERRI Theatre Company, The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, VicHealth, The Koorie Heritage Trust, The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc (VAEAI), Arts Victoria, Regional Arts Victoria and The State Library of Victoria.

of Coranderrk, and colonial Victoria and Australia more generally. The final section concludes by reflecting on the potential contribution of *CWWSC* to bring history into the present.

This piece is a collaborative effort of five professionals associated with the 'Minutes of Evidence' project – four academics from the disciplinary fields of history, socio-legal studies and criminology, and one actor, Melodie Reynolds-Diarra, a Wongi woman from Western Australia who has played the roles of Alice Grant, Caroline Morgan, Eda Brangy and Phinnimore Jackson in *CWWSC*, and whose reflections we draw upon to frame each of the sections of our discussion.⁵

The history of Coranderrk and the 1881 inquiry

The history of Coranderrk provides a window onto the history of colonial dispossession and genocide in settler states more generally. Historian Patrick Wolfe has influentially explained settler colonialism as distinctive from other colonial formations in that colonisers come to stay, claiming the sovereign lands of Indigenous peoples as their own. Within this conceptual framework, settler colonialism is regarded as a continuing 'structure', rather than 'an event' that begins and ends at the point of colonisation.⁶ Within Wolfe's framework, settler societies proceed according to a 'logic of elimination' that seeks continually to marginalise the significance of Indigenous sovereignty, thereby explaining enduring state discrimination against Indigenous peoples in contemporary settler states such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America.⁷ In the Australian case, the ongoing structure of colonialism is manifest in contemporary society, and stems from dispossession, the attempted destruction of a people and a persistent failure to accord them equal citizenship.

In the south-eastern colonies of Australia, as several of the preceding chapters in this collection have outlined, dispossession was relatively swift and comprehensive. Aboriginal peoples' early modes of resistance were overwhelmed not only by diseases and acts of violence but also by the massive disruption that pastoralism effected to traditional economies. Their communities subsequently 'suffered whiplash' – to borrow Boucher and Russell's words in their introductory chapter – 'as the lethal materialities of settler land hunger

5 An early version of this paper was presented at the 2011 Australian and New Zealand Critical Criminology conference: Jennifer Balint, Julie Evans, Nesam McMillan, 'Minutes of Evidence: raising awareness of structural injustice and justice', in *Proceedings of the 5th Annual Australian and New Zealand Critical Criminology Conference*, James Cook University, Townsville, 1(1), 2012.

6 Patrick Wolfe, 'Nation and MiscegeNation: discursive continuity in the post-Mabo era', *Social Analysis* 36 (1994): 96.

7 Wolfe, 'Nation and MiscegeNation': 93.

were compounded and amplified by the explosive impact of the gold rush'.⁸ As a consequence of this, the first three decades of settler colonisation in Victoria saw a serious diminution in the numbers of Aboriginal peoples and widespread interference with their hold on traditional lands and their capacity to maintain cohesive communities and cultures.⁹ Meanwhile, although rarely critical of colonialism *per se*, certain individuals amongst the settler population expressed concern about the plight of Indigenous peoples in the Australian colonies and elsewhere. A number of missionary societies became involved in an endeavour to protect, convert and educate Aboriginal peoples, and official 'protectorates' were established in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia. However, for Aboriginal people, they proved to be little more than short-lived attempts to provide rations and places of refuge; and, in the end, as Leigh Boucher discusses in more detail in Chapter 3, the Port Phillip Protectorate was regarded as a failure.¹⁰

Aboriginal people in Victoria were not passive spectators in all these events, but rather agents of their own destinies. Whether by forming strategic relationships with settlers and officials, or by way of 'economic entrepreneurialism' and shifting their 'traditional econoscape to accommodate the new resources presented by European colonisation', as Lynette Russell shows in Chapter 1, Aboriginal people adopted, and adapted to, whatever elements they could in the new social order that so irrevocably changed their world. Thus, from the 1840s in Victoria, a new phase of Aboriginal activism emerged. Kulin leaders such as Woiwurrung elder Billibellary, his son Simon Wonga and nephew William Barak, for example, saw the need for the Kulin clans as a whole to adopt a different approach if their peoples were to survive the dramatic consequences of the initial occupation of their lands, which now constituted much of the central regions of the colony. In 1859, Simon Wonga led a delegation of Kulin people to meet with government officials to request a grant of land to settle and farm in Acheron, in the hills beyond Melbourne. Coinciding with a select committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria (discussed by Jessie Mitchell and Ann

8 Leigh Boucher and Lynette Russell, 'Introduction: Colonial history, postcolonial theory and the "Aboriginal problem" in colonial Victoria': 1.

9 See Diane Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*, Laura E Barwick and Richard E Barwick (eds), *Aboriginal History Inc.*, Canberra, 1998; Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: A History Since 1788*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2010: 74–80; Jan Critchett, *A Distant Field of Murder: Western District Frontiers 1834–1848*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1990; Public Record Office Victoria [PROV] and the Australian Archives, Victorian Regional Office, *'My Heart is Breaking': A Joint Guide to Records about Aboriginal Peoples in the Public Record Office Victoria and the Australian Archives*, Victorian Regional Office Australian Government Publishing Service Canberra, 1993; Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and Patricia Grimshaw (eds), *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867–1926*, History Department, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2002; Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous Peoples and Settlers in 19th-Century Pacific Rim Cities*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2010.

10 The Port Phillip Protectorate lasted for just 11 years: 1838–49 (see, Michael Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria, 1835–86*, University of Sydney Press, Sydney, 1979: 81–135, for a general overview) while the protectorates in WA and SA were both wound up by 1857.

Curthoys in Chapter 8) that recommended the creation of reserves in Aboriginal home lands under the supervision of missionaries, the delegation was one of several attempts by Aboriginal leaders in Victoria to establish a permanent and productive stake in the land at sites of their choosing, all of which struggled to succeed in the face of inadequate resources and concerted opposition from hostile settlers and officials.¹¹

The Kulin people were soon displaced from the Acheron station, and in 1863 Simon Wonga and William Barak led another deputation that successfully petitioned the government to grant a reserve of 930 hectares (extended to 1,960 hectares in 1866) at a place they called Coranderrk, after the small Christmas Bush that blooms there each December, beside the Yarra River near Healesville. This became one of six reserves that the government eventually established throughout the colony, as Claire McLisky outlines in greater detail in Chapter 5.¹²

The settlement at Coranderrk proved particularly successful with most Kulin people choosing to reside there, along with several Bangerang people who travelled there from the Murray River, together with individuals and families from clans across Victoria who had been similarly displaced. By 1874, despite having no secure title, they had cleared over 1,200 hectares for vegetable, crop and cattle farming, stretched 7 kilometres of fencing, constructed 32 cottages plus outbuildings, raised families and built a thriving community that also made and sold cultural artefacts and mud bricks. The award-winning quality of Coranderrk's hops attracted the highest market prices and by 1875 the settlement was described as being 'virtually self-supporting'.¹³ A uniquely respectful relationship had developed between William Barak (Simon Wonga had died in 1874) and John Green who, as well as acting as inspector of stations across Victoria, had also been appointed as manager of Coranderrk, which he had originally founded alongside Barak and Wonga. Green to a relatively large extent supported the continuation of certain Kulin laws and practices, and negotiated community agreement regarding the management of the farm and the punishment of offences.¹⁴

Yet broader government indifference to the long-term welfare of the Aboriginal population either on or off the six Victorian reserves, along with outright hostility from settlers keen to acquire even more productive land, consistently worked against the achievement of a just settlement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the colony. The historian Richard Broome explains

11 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 38, 1–53; Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*: 81–88.

12 These six Victorian reserves were Framlingham and Lake Condah for the Gunditjmarra and Kirraewurrung clans of the western district; Ebenezer mission at Lake Hindmarsh for the tribes of Wimmera and Lower Murray regions; Ramahyuk and Lake Tyers for the Kurnai tribes of Gippsland; and Coranderrk for the Kulin clans of central Victoria (Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 52).

13 Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*: 84.

14 Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*: 85–86.

that as Aboriginal labour was either unpaid, paid in liquor, or severely underpaid, it was impossible for people to feed their families without seeking additional work, while paternalistic or authoritarian management on reserves led to beatings and withdrawal of rations.¹⁵ As Leigh Boucher illustrates in Chapter 3, Aboriginal people were placed under additional surveillance and control following the *Aborigines Protection Act 1869* (Vic) that established the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (discussed by Samuel Furphy in Chapter 4), which oversaw the movement of people between reserves and the removal of children, and required Aboriginal people to write for official permission to visit family and friends.¹⁶ With respect to Coranderrk in particular, John Green was eventually goaded into resigning his position after several altercations with the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (henceforth, 'the Board'), including over the appropriation of the community's hard-earned profits to supplement state revenue and threats to close Coranderrk and relocate its people to the Murray River region in order to make the land available for private sale.

The Coranderrk community's sustained protests against these developments eventually became known as the Coranderrk 'rebellion', a designation indicating the strength of official fears that Aboriginal quests for self-determination might spread to other reserves. Under the leadership of William Barak, together with his chief aides and 'speakers' Thomas Bamfield (Birdarak), Robert Wandin (Wandon) and Thomas Dunolly, the men and women of Coranderrk mounted a sustained campaign to stay on their country, to maintain their productive self-supporting community there, and to reinstate their friend and ally, John Green, as manager. On numerous occasions they undertook the long walk to Melbourne to talk with government ministers in Spring Street, while also writing petitions, letters and interviews, and recruiting the assistance of influential supporters in the white community such as the redoubtable Scottish woman and friend of Barak and Bamfield, Anne Fraser Bon. The campaign resulted in two official inquiries: a royal commission in 1877 and a parliamentary board of inquiry into the management of Coranderrk in 1881 (the particular focus of this paper and the theatre performance, *CWWSC*).

The 1881 inquiry, and the evidence which it collected from Aboriginal and European witnesses, was unique in many ways. Appointed by Victoria's Chief-Secretary Graham Berry, the nine commissioners sat for two-and-a-half months. They travelled to Coranderrk to hear the views of residents who bravely delivered their testimony before officials despite the overwhelming repression to which their peoples had long been subjected. But unlike many other inquiries into the condition of Indigenous peoples in the British Empire during the nineteenth

15 Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*: 92.

16 See Elizabeth Nelson, Sandra Smith and Patricia Grimshaw (eds), *Letters from Aboriginal Women of Victoria, 1867–1926*, History Department, University of Melbourne, 2002.

century, its cause was not the lobbying of British humanitarians (who, by the 1880s, had lost much of their influence in matters of pan-colonial governance), nor solely the work of politicians, missionaries and philanthropists. Rather, the inquiry was in great part a result of the sustained campaign that had been led by the residents of Coranderrk, with support from their friends and allies in the settler community, to appeal for justice and protection from the government against the ongoing effects of settler-colonisation. For although Coranderrk had started off as a refuge, even as a place of incarceration for the Kulin clans of Victoria who had established the station in 1863, it had gradually become a thriving and economically self-sustaining community – one that the Kulin clans were determined to defend. This is evinced by the petition, which the residents presented to the commissioners of the inquiry. Dated 16 November 1881, it was signed by William Barak and 44 men, women and children of Coranderrk. It asked for John Green to return as manager and for the station to be under the Chief Secretary rather than the Board – ‘then we will show the country that the station could self support itself.’¹⁷ The inquiry’s overall findings rejected the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines’ intentions to dispose of Coranderrk; three years later it was gazetted as a ‘permanent reservation’.¹⁸ While John Green was not reinstated as manager, his replacement, the reviled Reverend Strickland, was dismissed and – in the short term – conditions improved for Coranderrk’s residents.

From a historical perspective, a key feature of the inquiry is the prominent presence of the voices of Aboriginal people involved. Aboriginal people made up almost a third of the 69 witnesses who were examined and their statements are recorded in the official minutes of evidence. Previous commissions of inquiry into the condition and management of the Aboriginal population of Victoria had taken evidence only from a handful of Aboriginal witnesses. The select committee of 1858–59 contains a plenitude of opinions from settlers, missionaries and ‘protectors’, but no Aboriginal voices; while the 1877 Royal Commission only interviewed four Aboriginal people – cherry-picked witnesses who were counted on to be compliant.¹⁹ The minutes of the Coranderrk inquiry, on the other hand, contain the testimonies of 21 Aboriginal people, including men, women and children, many of whom, in the act of testifying against their overseers and the Board were risking all they had in order to appeal to

17 *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence: 98.

18 *Victoria Government Gazette*, No. 119, 10 October 1884: 2867.

19 ‘Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines, Together with the Proceedings of Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendices’, *Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Victoria*, Session 1858–59, Vol I; Victoria, Royal Commission on the Aborigines, ‘Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Present Condition of the Aborigines of this colony, and to Advise as to the Best Means of Caring for, and Dealing with Them, in the Future, Together with Minutes of Evidence and Appendices’, *Papers Presented to Both House of Parliament, Victoria*, Session 1877–78, Vol. III. (For these testimonies, see Minutes of Evidence: 26–33).

colonial authorities for the right to remain at Coranderrk. The body of evidence submitted by the Aboriginal people of Coranderrk indeed offers a damning indictment of the governance of Aboriginal people in Victoria. It also represents a valuable early record of the strength, adaptability and sagacity of people such as William Barak, the Wurundjeri leader and spokesperson for the Coranderrk community, who, in the space of a lifetime had experienced a huge cultural shift: from living the pre-colonial ways of life to experiencing firsthand their disruption and destruction at the hand of European invasion; from enduring life on a mission station to witnessing, towards the end of his life, the birth of the Australian nation (Barak was born in the 1820s and died in 1903). The minutes of the Coranderrk inquiry also dispel many prejudices and misconceptions – prevalent then, and unfortunately even now – about how Aboriginal people responded to colonisation. The oral evidence itself demonstrates that, at a time when the dominant view in settler society suggested that Aboriginal people were a ‘dying race’ – destined to vanish within a short space of time, and incapable of helping themselves – Aboriginal communities remained resilient and strong in their negotiation and contestation of the lived realities of settler colonial rule. Having appropriated and redeployed the settlers’ language and literacy in order to write letters, petitions and form deputations to ministers, the Coranderrk community was in fact helping to kick-start the kind of campaigns for justice, self-determination and land rights which would extend into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The body of evidence collected from the European witnesses who testified at the Coranderrk inquiry constitutes another element, which makes this document of particular historical significance. On the one hand, some of the European witnesses (Edward Curr, Captain AMA Page, the Rev. FA Hagenauer, and others) represented the interests of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines and were strongly opposed to the right of Aboriginal people to have a say in the management of their own affairs. But there were other European witnesses (John Green, Thomas Harris, George Alexander Syme) as well as members of the Board of Inquiry itself (such as Anne Bon, Thomas Embling and John Dow), who spoke out in support of the Coranderrk community, often at personal cost. As such, the archive produced by the inquiry provides a rich record of not only Aboriginal voices and activism, and of European injustices, but also of the possibilities for both settlers and Aboriginal people to work as allies on issues of social justice, providing important models and lessons for collaboration in the present and future. The history of Coranderrk highlights that not all Europeans thought about, and behaved towards, Aboriginal people in the same way, challenging the belief that racial intolerance and exploitation of Aboriginal people was simply accepted as the norm in the 1800s.

Thanks to the bureaucratic efficiency of the agents of the British Empire, the minutes of evidence of the Coranderrk inquiry survive to this day in the archives, alongside the volumes of evidence collected and attached to the hundreds of other reports of official commissions during the nineteenth century. As such the document has seldom been visited by anyone other than historians and researchers; and yet these minutes are a record of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal oral history that provide a valuable and rare insight into a fascinating chapter of Victorian history. When placed in the context of more recent events, and delivered through a publicly engaging medium, this body of evidence can in fact offer an opportunity to broaden the field of engagement with Victoria's history and demonstrate some valuable lessons for the present.

Verbatim theatre, history and re-staging Coranderrk

I've been acting for over 20 years, primarily in the theatre, and Coranderrk is my first verbatim work. Although many of my plays have been based on events regarding Aboriginal issues, being verbatim, Coranderrk holds the weight of fact, which, through theatre, resonates powerfully. Being given the responsibility of performing these characters differs from past characters I've played because not only did these people exist in time and place, their voice-dialogue holds the truth and fact of that moment.

I love the power of theatre because it takes us out of our analytical mind and into the shared sensorial experience of storytelling. This is exemplified in the verbatim script of Coranderrk where the analytical function is altered because there are few questions to be answered with regard to the truth of the script, in contrast with fictional or interpretive stories where both actors and audience question the truths that are portrayed. This was most apparent during the Q&A sessions after performances. The questions were mainly focused on the personal experiences of the actors in performing this historical play and, how the script came to be put together, not the authenticity of the material.

(Melodie Reynolds-Diarra, actor, CWWSC)

Through the re-performance of the actual testimonies that were delivered at the 1881 Coranderrk inquiry, CWWSC enables present-day audiences to connect with this remarkable episode in Victorian history. The production, which has been performed On Country and in public, and will be made available to the Victorian secondary school curriculum from early 2015, is thus central to two of

the key aims of the 'Minutes of Evidence' project: to raise awareness of historical and structural injustice and to promote new modes of publicly engaging with it. The unique character of *CWWSC* is traceable, as Melodie Reynolds-Diarra suggests above, to its dualistic nature – it is a factual historical piece based on primary source materials, yet it is also a piece of theatre that conjures emotion, activates the senses and enables audiences to connect with and be moved by the history being depicted. It offers audiences an accessible and engaging means of experiencing a personal connection with the voices of the past; allowing those voices to speak again to contemporary Australian audiences, and enabling such audiences to form their own interpretation of the history and voices enacted.

The dualistic nature of *CWWSC* is a function of its status as a verbatim-style theatre production. Verbatim theatre, a form of so-called 'documentary theatre', involves the re-performance of the words used by certain people (as they were recorded in interviews, diaries, legal proceedings or transcripts from an inquiry from a century prior) as a theatrical piece.²⁰ These testimonies are edited, arranged or re-contextualised to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors play the characters of the actual individuals whose words are being used.²¹ In this vein, the *CWWSC* production is an 80-minute theatre performance wholly constructed around the edited testimonies and statements, petitions and letters delivered in the context of the Coranderrk inquiry, as they were recorded in the official minutes of evidence.²² In total, the script comprises the testimonies of nine Indigenous witnesses and 10 non-Indigenous witnesses and the statements of two of the non-Indigenous commissioners who undertook the questioning at the inquiry.

Reflecting the synthesis between the historical and theatrical worlds that underscores the production, the script was prepared collaboratively, by historian, Giordano Nanni, and Yorta Yorta playwright, Andrea James. First piloted in August 2010 in the form of a rehearsed reading, *CWWSC* has gradually grown into a fully fledged theatrical production that was first presented to the

20 See Carol Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence', *TDR: The Drama Review* 50(3), 2006: 8–15; Derek Paget, 'Verbatim theatre: oral history and documentary techniques', *New Theatre Quarterly* 3(12), 1987: 317–336. The production could also be framed as a form of documentary theatre known as 'tribunal theatre'. Indeed, *Coranderrk* represents a blend of both tribunal and verbatim theatre – centred upon the testimonies delivered at a legal inquiry, rather than personal interviews or memoirs (resembling tribunal theatre), yet not striving theatrically to exactly replicate the physical conditions of this inquiry (thus departing from strict tribunal theatre and evincing the artistic license more associated with verbatim theatre). See Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson, 'Introduction', in Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson (eds), *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, Palgrave MacMillan, Houndmills, 2009: 1–5; Derek Paget, 'The "broken tradition" of documentary theatre and its continued powers of endurance', in Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson (eds), *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present*, Palgrave MacMillan, Houndmills, 2009: 224–238.

21 Will Hammond and Dan Steward, *Verbatim Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, Oberon Books, London, 2011: 1.

22 That is, the testimonies and statements from the inquiry are only supplemented by letters that were also submitted to the inquiry – and some newspaper reports of the testimony/inquiry.

public in November 2011 at the La Mama Courthouse Theatre by the ILBIJERRI Theatre Company in association with the 'Minutes of Evidence' project and its various partners. The pilot production was directed by Rachael Maza (Artistic Director of ILBIJERRI Theatre Company) and developed in collaboration with Liz Jones (La Mama Theatre), with the second stage of CWWSC's development being directed by Isaac Drandic (also of ILBIJERRI Theatre Company). CWWSC brings together a cast of four Aboriginal, and five non-Aboriginal actors, who have shifted throughout time, as their availability permits. The production is therefore an inherently collaborative endeavour, which has sought to embody the spirit of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal collaboration that it depicts.²³

At a basic level, the performance raises awareness of the history of the Coranderrk Aboriginal station, and of nineteenth-century colonial Victoria more generally, amongst the broader community. Since its pilot phase, CWWSC has attracted close to 3,000 audience members, enabling broad public engagement with both the story of Coranderrk and the primary source historical material on which it is based. Moreover, it presents this history in a new and innovative way. It is now widely acknowledged that different fictional and non-fictional representations of suffering and injustice, from memoirs to feature films to documentary films, offer different ways of connecting with such experiences.²⁴ As Derbyshire and Hodson note,²⁵ at a time when there is a generalised concern with the 'indifference' or 'compassion fatigue' of global audiences to stories of suffering,²⁶ mediums such as theatre have the ability to successfully engage spectators on an emotional and affective level. Theatre and performance provide a new way for audiences to relate to events, stories and experiences, one which foregrounds emotion, imagination and affect.²⁷

The mode of connection facilitated by CWWSC is a function of its character as both a historical work and a piece of theatre. As a piece of verbatim theatre, the production innovatively unites the creative and emotive elements of theatre with the authority and authenticity of the archive.²⁸ That is, verbatim theatre has an overt claim to truth, positioning itself as an expression, a re-enactment,

23 This character of the performance (as collaboration on- and off-stage) was highlighted by its creator, Giordano Nanni, as well as being mentioned in the historical introduction to the initial stagings of the performance delivered by academic Tony Birch.

24 Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2004; Paola Botham, 'Witnesses in the public sphere: *Bloody Sunday* and the redefinition of political theatre', in Susan C Haedicke, Deirdre Heddom, Avraham Oz and EJ Westlake (eds), *Political Performances: Theory and Practice*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2009: 35–55.

25 Harry Derbyshire and Loveday Hodson, 'Performing injustice: Human rights and verbatim theatre', *Law and Humanities* 2(2), 2008: 207.

26 See Susan D Moeller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sell Disease, Famine, War and Death*, Routledge, New York, 1999; Keith Tester, *Moral Culture*, Sage Publications, London, 1997.

27 Derbyshire and Hodson, 'Performing injustice'.

28 See Botham, 'Witnesses in the public sphere'.

of actual testimonies and events.²⁹ Importantly, though, the power of verbatim theatre is inseparable from its claim to truth; the power of a performance such as *CWWSC* stems from its self-representation and audience reception as a direct re-performance of the actual words spoken by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal witnesses in late nineteenth-century Victoria. As Melodie Reynolds-Diarra observes above, ‘Coranderrk holds the weight of fact which, through theatre, resonates powerfully’. It is the facticity of the testimonies that – at least, in part – enables them to inspire emotions, such as shock, disavowal and respect, in the audience.

The verbatim nature of the evidence is also crucial in a context such as Australia, where there have been many destructive and divisive debates about the accuracy of ‘revisionist’ accounts of Aboriginal history and particularly Aboriginal oppression.³⁰ It acts as an implicit rebuttal to the claims and speakers that seek to downplay the actuality of disadvantage, dispossession and discrimination both historically and in contemporary times. It is the factual basis of this production that also underpins its role as an educational and informative tool.³¹ A key contribution of the performance is its capacity to provide audiences with a substantiated picture of particular interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in nineteenth-century Australia as well as the discriminatory attitudes that prevailed. Leaving, as Melodie Reynolds-Diarra notes, ‘few questions to be answered with regard to the truth of the script’, *CWWSC* exposes audiences to the history of the Coranderrk station in a way that has the capacity to side-step unproductive debates about the ‘reality’ of the claims being advanced in order to provide audiences with an opportunity to connect with these historical events and the broader trends of colonial governance that they reflect.

Indeed, *CWWSC* draws attention to various themes that facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of the realities of colonial governance in Victoria. First, the testimonies incorporated into the production provide a snapshot of the prejudice and injustice experienced by Aboriginal peoples and communities. The statements of European witnesses, such as Edward Curr (an influential member of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines), stand as evidence of the racist discourse that prevailed at the time and informed colonial policies.

29 See Derbyshire and Hodson, ‘Performing injustice’; Botham, ‘Witnesses in the public sphere’.

30 Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Van Diemen’s Land 1803–1847*, Macleay Press, Sydney, 2002; Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003; Robert Manne (ed), *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle’s Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, Black Ink Agenda, Melbourne, 2003.

31 See, more generally, Derbyshire and Hodson, ‘Performing injustice’; Paget, ‘The “broken tradition” of documentary theatre and its continued powers of endurance’.

Through Curr's testimony, it becomes clear how Aboriginal people were seen and treated as 'less than' their European counterparts, as not possessing the capacity for reason and emotion and thus childlike, as in the following excerpts:

Q: I suppose the blacks have the common human affections to places – would not they form an attachment to a place?

A: No, I do not think so.

...

Q: Did you ever consult the blacks about the question [of their removal from Coranderrk]?

A: No.

Q: Do you think that is fair?

A: Most decidedly for their good.

Q: Are they children?

A: Yes.

Q: Are they not men?

A: No, they are children. They have no more self-reliance than children.

Q: If they offend against the law are they punished like children?

A: No, like men.

Q: Is that just?

A: I did not make the laws.³²

These excerpts also reveal the 'ambivalent' and contradictory character of colonial discourse and its constitutive stereotypes,³³ which rely on the characterisation of Indigenous people as *both* childlike and fully responsible in order to facilitate their oppression. The distinct exploitation characteristic of settler colonialism is also highlighted through a recurring theme throughout the testimonies of the refusal of the Board to fence the land around the Coranderrk station, arguably undermining any community claims to ownership of the land.

³² *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence: 121.

³³ See Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994: 94–95, 118.

As Wolfe has emphasised, such an appropriation of land is key to the settler colonial enterprise, in which the authority and existence of the settler colonial state is – in part – a function of its literal occupation of a certain territory.³⁴

Secondly, though, *CWWSC* also testifies to the resistance of Aboriginal people to colonial repression. The words spoken by the Aboriginal witnesses at the inquiry stand as evidence of the continued sense of dignity and agency maintained by Aboriginal peoples and communities in the face of the indignities and exploitation of settler colonial life. Thus, residents of Coranderrk, such as Alice Grant, testify to their refusal to partake in relations of discrimination:

A: I used to do Mrs. Strickland's ironing, but I do not do it now.

Q: Did you refuse to do it?

A: Yes.

Q: Were you receiving wages for doing it?

A: No.

Q: Why did you refuse?

A: Because I did not want to do it.³⁵

The resilience of Aboriginal communities, who steadfastly maintained a commitment to self-determination and resisted settler colonial attempts to destroy a sense of their political and social independence, is also well-expressed by the testimony of Coranderrk's acknowledged leader and spokesperson, William Barak. Articulating what it was the Coranderrk residents sought through their deputations to Melbourne and their testimony at the commission of inquiry, Barak explains that they would like it if 'the Government leave us here, give us this ground and let us manage here and get all the money. Why do not the people do it themselves – do what they like, and go on and do the work?'³⁶

Thirdly, *CWWSC* also testifies to the collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Through the words of Anne Bon and John Green (as well as John Harris and George A Syme) it becomes clear that not all Europeans embraced the racialised and discriminatory discourse and practice of settler colonial life. John Green's testimony, for example, provides a markedly different account of Aboriginal communities than that of Curr and thus a window onto the existence of a different mode of relation. In his testimony, Green states 'I

34 Wolfe, 'Nation and MiscegeNation: discursive continuity in the post-Mabo era'.

35 *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence: 68.

36 *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence: 9.

always treated them as free men, and reasoned with them ... If the Aboriginal is put into the question, he will strive to keep his own law. That is where I consider you have failed.'³⁷

This sense of mutual respect and collaboration is also, importantly, expressed through the actions and words of the Aboriginal community at Coranderrk, in their petition to the inquiry, which advances the following demands:

We want the Board and the Inspector, Captain Page, to be no longer over us. We want only one man here, and that is Mr. John Green, and the station to be under the Chief Secretary; then *we will show the country* that the station could self-support itself.³⁸

It is this demand that thus informs the subtitle for the production and positions this re-telling of history as one that seeks to recognise and draw attention to not only Aboriginal exploitation but also the possibility that matters could have been otherwise.

Of course, in drawing attention to these themes, the script and production provide a particular picture of the 1881 inquiry. They are necessarily selective, incorporating some witnesses and some testimony, but not others – the production is not a literal restaging of the entire inquiry. Importantly, the script achieves a balance between Aboriginal and European testimony – a balance that does not reflect the composition of the actual minutes of evidence, which is dominated by European witnesses. In this way, although the translation of the inquiry archives into a shorter, thematic work could be said to qualify the 'truth claim' of verbatim theatre, it is this artistic and historical re-engagement with the primary source documents that contributes to the theatrical power and strength of *CWWSC*. As Martin explains, it is through such choices (in our case, the choice to focus on key themes of colonial governance and collaboration, and to ensure that the voices of the Aboriginal witnesses were heard) that 'the creative work of documentary theatre gets done'.³⁹

Moreover, in relying on the actual words that were spoken, and were recorded as being spoken, at the 1881 inquiry, the production still maintains a connection to the 'real' and the 'actual'.⁴⁰ These testimonies, despite their arrangement, composition and rendition in the performance, are real; as Melodie Reynolds-Diarra observes of the characters and their testimony, 'not only did these people exist in time and place, their voice-dialogue holds the truth and fact of that

37 *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence: 135–136.

38 *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence: 98 (emphasis added).

39 Martin, 'Bodies of evidence': 9. For reflections of the writers on the process of crafting the verbatim script of the play see, Nanni & James, *Coranderrk: We Will Show The Country*: 198–200.

40 See Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 2000.

moment'. Similarly, writing of another verbatim performance, Simić vividly explains that '[a]lthough a representation of reality and not reality itself, in the performance the audience is reminded that what happened *was a reality*'.⁴¹ In a similar vein, *CWWSC*, although it is a representation of the inquiry and the testimonies delivered there, still gains much of its power from the fact that this inquiry occurred and these testimonies were delivered, speaking to the injustices that occurred, the justice that was sought and the Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations and collaborations that informed such claims.

The contribution of *Coranderrk*: Engendering connections with history for change

I am passionate about theatre as a medium because it is true to storytelling, where a human being is standing in front of another human being, sharing the air, emotion and wisdom. In *Coranderrk*, the story that is told takes both the audience and performer on a journey that connects the present to the past, thereby creating a better understanding of our history.

(Melodie Reynolds-Diarra, actor, *CWWSC*)

The *CWWSC* performance highlights the story of *Coranderrk* as one of historical injustice. In doing so, it has the potential to catalyse public conversations about structural and historical Indigenous injustice in Australia and elsewhere. Audience responses from the performances have been an acknowledgement of the injustices perpetrated and the colonial framework that perpetrated them. The performances have also provided a space for reflection on the continuation of this colonial framework, and the continuities in practices of repression and governance. Such focused engagement can be an important adjunct to the pursuit of more formal legal avenues for redress and reform, effectively supporting the capacity of Australians 'to imagine new paths for moving forward and ... our willingness to overcome any political obstacles'.⁴² Verbatim theatre thus functions here as a site and an opportunity for these 'new imaginings', acting as a 'meeting point'. Botham explains how theatre can act as a 'meeting point' for audience members, whilst she and others note the historical role of the theatre (as well as the courtroom, or tribunal venue) as a forum for putting forward claims relating to justice and injustice.⁴³ In this sense, the audience – who

41 Olivera Simić, 'Breathing sense into women's lives shattered by war: Dah Theatre Belgrade', *Law Text Culture* 14(1), 2010: 122.

42 Sean Brennan, Brenda Gunn and George Williams, "'Sovereignty" and its relevance to treaty-making between Indigenous peoples and Australian governments', *Sydney Law Review* 26, 2004: 352.

43 Botham, 'Witnesses in the public sphere': 36. See also Derbyshire and Hodson, 'Performing injustice'.

collectively experience the CWWSC performance – is brought together to hear and respond to the claims for justice articulated as part of the 1881 inquiry and the injustices of which they speak.

Through bringing historical figures so powerfully back to life, CWWSC re-enacts the past, and thus enables audience members to experience an understanding of the past in the present. This both facilitates a more direct connection between contemporary audiences and historical events, as well as providing ground for links and connections to be drawn between such events and current conditions.⁴⁴ In the context of the 'Minutes of Evidence' project, this places past Aboriginal injustice in relation to contemporary Aboriginal disadvantage, acknowledging what Cunneen and Baldry have referred to as the 'unbroken chain'.⁴⁵ Such temporal connections have been drawn by people who have seen the production, who have related the CWWSC experience to the ongoing Northern Territory Intervention. The Federal government's lack of consultation (despite the explicit recommendations for genuine consultation of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report), and its introduction of degrading income-management policies designed to control the lives of Aboriginal people, reverberates strongly in the paternalistic tone assumed by the Board for the Protection of Aborigines' attempts to control the lives of Aboriginal people at Coranderrk. As Addendum B to the Coranderrk inquiry's report stated, Aboriginal people 'must be, from the nature of the case, the least capable people of all persons in deciding how or by whom the station should be managed'.⁴⁶

The testimony of Edward Curr is particularly significant in terms of highlighting the structural continuities between past and present, given that in recent years his voice has been re-invoked in official settings to justify the continuation of Indigenous dispossession into the twenty-first century. Curr's testimony during the Coranderrk inquiry offers a clear example of colonial governance's refusal to acknowledge Aboriginal rights to self-determination:

Q: Would you think it desirable to send them away from Coranderrk against their own will?

A: Anyone who knows the blacks knows their will is nothing, that they might have a serious objection now which they would not remember three months afterwards. I would suggest that they should be moved for their own benefit. I would not leave them to acquire habits of drink under the mistaken philanthropy of not interfering with them.⁴⁷

44 See Rokem, *Performing History*.

45 Eileen Baldry and Chris Cunneen, 'Contemporary Penalty in the Shadow of Colonial Patriarchy', *Proceedings of the 5th Annual Australian and New Zealand Critical Criminology Conference*, James Cook University, Townsville, 1(1), 2012.

46 *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*, Addendum B: vii.

47 *Report of the Coranderrk Inquiry*, Minutes of Evidence: 20.

As many historians know, in the *Yorta Yorta* native title judgment (1998), Federal Court Justice Olney relied heavily on Edward Curr's memoir, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* (published in 1883, just two years after Curr's participation at the Coranderrk inquiry) in formulating his final ruling: that Yorta Yorta title to, and connections with, ancestral lands had been 'washed away' by 'the tide of history' before the end of the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Relying uncritically on Curr's nostalgic memoir, rather than the oral evidence submitted by contemporary Yorta Yorta claimants to demonstrate the continuity of culture from pre-colonial times, Justice Olney claimed that Curr had 'clearly established a degree of rapport with the local Aboriginal people'.⁴⁹ Historians have already highlighted Justice Olney's problematic use of Curr's *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria* in the *Yorta Yorta* native title case: Samuel Furphy, for instance, who documents Olney's uncritical elevation of Curr's writings to the status of 'credible primary evidence', advocates 'the need for a critical appraisal of Curr, his life, his biases, his opinions and attitudes to Aboriginal people'.⁵⁰ Whilst historians have argued this case in scholarly forums, the general public remains almost entirely unaware of how compromised and ill-judged Olney's reliance on Curr was. But audiences who attended CWWSC were able to hear Curr's words and ideas brought back to life; and *they* were left in little doubt as to his actual opinions of and rapport with Aboriginal people.

Redress of structural and historical injustice requires recognition that it occurred. A first step towards redressing structural injustice is heightening public awareness of its existence – a difficult process given the controversy that has often surrounded attempts to acknowledge structural injustice in Australia, such as the apology to Stolen Generations and the ongoing debate about reparations. What this performance seeks to do is to integrate these historical realities back into public discourse, and thus to provide a basis for discussions about the necessity for redress and reform – a new structural justice.

Bringing history back to life

The popularisation of historical stories, through documentaries, films, theatre and other mediums, has the potential to engage broader Australian audiences with the nation's colonial past and its ongoing implications. Yet, in certain

48 Wayne Atkinson (Yorta Yorta Native Title Claimant) 2000, '19 Seconds of Dungudja Wala: Reflections Paper on The Yorta Yorta Native Title Judgment', www.kooriweb.org/sljr/dungudjawala.htm, accessed 30 November 2012.

49 The Members of the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal Community v The State of Victoria (1998), Federal Court of Australia, 1606, para. 53.

50 Samuel Furphy, 'Edward Micklethwaite Curr's *Recollections of Squatting*: Biography, history and native title', in Penelope Edmonds and Samuel Furphy (eds), *Rethinking Colonial Histories: New and Alternative Approaches*, History Department, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, 2006: 39.

circumstances, the imperatives to entertain that shape such public and popular accounts of Australia's past can result in historically inaccurate narratives, in which historical facts are altered or glossed over for dramatic effect. The CWWSC production seeks both to facilitate broad public engagement with a unique, yet little known, episode of Victorian colonial history and to do so in a way that is historically and empirically grounded. This is one of the key ways in which the 'Minutes of Evidence' project seeks to expand the field of engagement with the notion and practice of history. To this end, it is crucial that the power of the CWWSC production stems from both its theatrical attributes and its historical credentials; through the medium of theatre, CWWSC brings audiences into a closer relation with the historical archive and what it reveals about colonial Victoria. The strength of CWWSC thus is a function of the remarkable history that it depicts, the theatrical re-enactment of the personal testimonies delivered there and the commitment of all the project's partners to re-perform these testimonies with a sense of loyalty to the history they are portraying and its significance. This sense of loyalty is expressed again by Melodie Reynolds-Diarra who explains the nature of re-performing these historical testimonies in the present as follows:

The honour of recreating Coranderrk is both nervous and exhilarating knowing that their descendants are in the audience watching. I felt the responsibility to be almost a conduit, where the challenge was to put aside my modern day attitudes and thoughts and let the words tell the story. Doing this, the audience is given the opportunity to form their own impression of the depicted events.

The next stage for the 'Minutes of Evidence' project is already underway. Overseen by DEECD, and in collaboration with VAEAI, Social Education Victoria is making the 1881 Coranderrk Inquiry and its key themes of dispossession, justice and collaboration available to the secondary school curriculum, where it will help to familiarise future generations of Victorians with the history of their own backyard. Students will be exposed to primary historical materials; to the language, ideas, opinions and official government policies that were once commonly adopted towards Aboriginal people to evidence of collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; and crucially, to the voices of Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century, which are often conspicuously absent from historical records. The project therefore continues to broaden the field of engagement with Victoria's colonial past through engaging students and teachers, including through the power of verbatim theatre, in a way that is entertaining as well as historically rigorous. Alongside this process, researchers are undertaking comparative and interdisciplinary analysis of the overarching project themes of structural justice and injustice. It is in this way that the

'Minutes of Evidence' project seeks to promote a greater public understanding of Australia's past and spark new conversations about the history and legacy of structural injustice and the possibilities of structural justice in the present.

For information about the project's development into the future, readers may wish to visit the website: www.minutesofevidence.com.au.

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