

1. The country has another past: Queensland and the History Wars

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Politicised history is a panacea, comforting the bereft, treating us, again and again, to the same consoling myths.

Iain Sinclair¹

As poet/performer Leonard Cohen would have it, 'Everybody knows the war is over/ Everybody knows the good guys lost':² but when it comes to such consideration of the so-called 'History Wars' in Australia, the outcome is arguably not so cut and dried. It is possible to suggest that although an academic orthodoxy, emphasising a predominant tale of conquest migration and the multiple consequences of dispossession, comprehensively won that war intellectually, it failed to do so culturally. The neoconservative challenge that posits a benign Australian exceptionalism in the global saga of colonisation, and which comes more from outside the history profession than within it, largely held the fort by controlling the operation of the drawbridge. The doubters and deniers of searing colonial origins were granted unimpeded media access and political endorsement, while the so-called 'black-armband' historians were left, exposed and vilified, suffering death by a thousand column-inches. As Lyndall Ryan put it in her 2003 article, pointedly titled, 'Reflections by a target of a media witch hunt':

Witch hunts follow a well laid out pattern. They usually begin with advanced warning ... that a target has been identified ... any response is dismissed as unsatisfactory and the reputation of the target is then ripped to shreds by print media columnists.

1 Sinclair 2009: 6.

2 Cohen and Robinson 1988: track 8.

In Ryan's case, a public furore, extending over six months, led in her words 'to calls by print media journalists ... asking when I would resign my position at the university and then to the Vice Chancellor ... asking when I would be sacked for shonky scholarship'.³

Perhaps the Australian media adopted the term 'wars' to designate this debacle because all can then be deemed 'fair' within them. There is, of course, a delicious irony in calling certain analytical differences 'wars', while simultaneously denying that repetitive physical conflicts embedded in our history, in which many thousands of people died, can ever be typified by such an excessive term. Yet, beyond this, the label 'History Wars' might be more appropriately replaced by that of 'Media Circus'. The Windschuttle campaign was conducted by much of the mainstream media with all the trappings of a moral crusade or, perhaps, a moral panic: the communal good had been assailed; a conspiracy to defraud had been exposed; the miscreants had been identified and public humiliation duly awarded. Righteous reckonings were recommended. Though some of the scholars embroiled in the argument attempted to play fairly by the rules of academic debate, the surrounding parameters of the discourse were already fatally flawed. Invariably, the good of the nation – and an equally fervent proclamation of 'the Australian Good' – were prioritised above the integrity of the discipline itself. History was cast as the hand-servant of Australia's national honour: its role of celebrating 'a story of achievement against overwhelming odds' was encouraged and applauded; its delinquent straying into the realm of negative critique denounced as disloyal and deceptive.⁴ The beast of Australian history, as John Howard averred in his 2006 'Tribute to *Quadrant*', displayed 'the fangs of the Left' and required, by implication, appropriate muzzling.⁵ The history profession's responsibility to promote and defend free-ranging research that may take any scholar in any direction on the trail of evidence on any subject – particularly in a publicly unpopular direction – was thereby severely compromised.

Secondly and probably most vitally, the debate was cast from the outset by its initiator as not so much about interpretive disagreement as an assault upon the scholarly integrity of certain individuals. A 'major academic deception', in Keith Windschuttle's estimation, had been exposed.⁶ The campaign was personal and the personal was political. Frontier conflict historians, much like most historians, had not simply made small transcriptive or interpretive errors across long careers of research but had, under the guise of scholarship, purposely lied to the nation, to their colleagues and to generations of unsuspecting students.

3 Ryan 2003: 106–107.

4 Rutherford 2000: 7–10; Brawley 1997.

5 Howard 2006: 23.

6 Clark 2008: 4.

They had done so systematically and cabalistically in order to fulfil a subversive ideological agenda. A number of 'referencing errors (in works up to thirty years old)' were nationally calibrated into a terrible ascription of guilt as, in a process akin to Chinese whispers, a conspiracy to defraud and mislead was unmasked and amplified.⁷ The leftward-leaning 'doyens of Australian history', as Janette Albrechtson of *The Australian* explained in 2006, had been exposed to public censure 'for telling fibs about so-called massacres'.⁸

The entire process bears very little resemblance to traditional academic debates, such as the earlier Botany Bay or *Convict Workers* disputes, or even the more spirited interchanges concerning gender's role in Australian history. As Ryan herself recognised, Windschuttle's attack:

was not premised on the basis of conscientious counter-interpretation or the simple discovering of empirical error. Rather it constituted a relentless accusation ... of lying. I cannot recall a single other example of such an assault in the entire corpus of Australian historiography. Even Malcolm Ellis accused Manning Clark only of consistent error rather than of outright charlatanism.⁹

Historical debunking had morphed into a process of forensic proof-reading for the purpose of wounding *ad hominem* attack. As Windschuttle's own writings demonstrate, and as he himself has more recently (and embarrassingly) experienced, it is easy enough to make mistakes.¹⁰

The history profession itself was initially caught flat-footed by such blatant character assassination. To the small sectors of 'black-armed' and 'white blindfolded' historians who engaged in the conflict might be added a third and much larger category, the 'white arms-folded' historians who chose to stand resolutely apart. Aboriginal scholars largely recoiled from a painful squabble about what appeared as blatantly obvious. In the hurley-burley of reining in the so-called 'excesses' of the race conflict historians, it seemed for a time to escape general notice that some central premises and methodologies of the profession, such as the principle of defending independent research, were also being assailed. Politics, populism and patriotism threatened to overwhelm established process. The subsequent appearance of the multi-authored *Whitewash*, Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark's *The History Wars*, and Bain Attwood's *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History*, as well as a plethora of critical articles, have more or less demolished the scholarly *bona fides* of Windschuttle's writings and those of his various published supporters from an intellectual point of view. Attwood, for

7 Bonnell and Crotty 2004: 430.

8 Albrechtson 2006.

9 Ryan 2003: 106.

10 Simons 2009; Taylor 2009: 197, 216–225.

instance, concludes that Windschuttle's 'poor and faulty' polemical intervention is 'essentially irrelevant in scholarly terms'.¹¹ James Boyce's two shorter pieces in *Whitewash* and *Island* magazine alone appear sufficient to devastate the shaky empirical and interpretative underpinnings of what he dubs 'that shameful, heartless and uniquely bad book', *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*.¹² In his masterly *Van Diemen's Land*, Boyce argues that Ryan and Henry Reynolds, far from exaggerating the Tasmanian Aboriginal death-rate from white violence, have 'actually moderated, not increased previous estimates'. Boyce finds himself more in agreement with 'most nineteenth century historians' who concluded that '[m]assacres were ... likely to have been commonplace. Equally horrific, and almost unscrutinised [he continues] were the government-sponsored ethnic clearances of the west coast *after* the fighting was over'.¹³ One could, as I hope this essay will demonstrate, say precisely the same for colonial Queensland.

Yet, as right-wing assault has withered, much of the mainstream media have maintained vigilant damage control as gate-keepers on that strategic bridge, spanning Australia's yawning chasm between elite, scholarly discourse and mass perception of the past. In the general public mind, it is down in this chasm that the black arm-banded historians largely remain, precisely where they were sacrificially hurled in 2002: And, so it is still widely held, good riddance to them!

The 'insistently political'¹⁴ tone of the debate – indeed, its plain nastiness – appears crucially connected to its examination of foundational moments, to the moral calculus of settler colonialism on which the nation's origins are based. Much therefore appears to be at stake. In a sense, the embarrassments, silences and obfuscations that once attended the awkward matter of convict origins across several generations have now been exclusively focused on that twin shame of origination – the story of dispossession and sequestration that converted Aboriginal lands into British ones as settlement progressed. Australia's substitute founding myth, the Anzac legend sees public service, to a marked degree, in diverting attention from this country's 'darkling plains'¹⁵ to the grim cliffs and beach-heads of Gallipoli. It is probably no coincidence that the various Howard governments revitalised Anzac reverence (first prompted by Bob Hawke's pilgrimage to the Peninsula in 1990) with the same degree of enthusiasm as they denounced the 'black-armband' reprobates. For in effect, Anzac and the frontier are obverse sides of the same interpretative coin. Anzac becomes the palatable rather than the distasteful story of national birth, where behaviours are apparently always ennobling rather than ignoble ones. Here,

11 Evans 2006: 24; Attwood 2005: 152.

12 Boyce 2003, 2004: 33.

13 Boyce 2008: 10–11.

14 Macintyre and Clark 2003: 221.

15 Evans et al 1993: 27.

the white Australian actors are portrayed as heroic and sacrificial rather than as potentially venal or cruel. The bloodshed of the real foundational saga is subverted and replaced by the glory and veneration attending the reticulated retelling of the Anzac blood-letting. The first story is as immersed in forgetting as the second is enmeshed in remembrance. The former is literally unspeakable; the latter liturgical. So that the latter, unfolding peculiarly upon a Turkish coastline, replaces the former, which explains, in considerable part, how migrant Australians came to inhabit what they now see as their own soil. This helps explain why it is invariably the race conflict historians and never the war historians who are freighted with the derisory 'black armband' label.

Historians have yet to construct a cartography of the selective trails of remembrance and forgetting in Australia's past. Furthermore, the labyrinthine pathways of denial and disclosure have as yet been scarcely entered. For a considerable time I have been fascinated by the cat-and-mouse games of revelation and suppression that investigation of the preserved records of the Queensland frontier continually throws up; and, in a recent essay, I concluded that denialism inheres within the very history that is now being denied. Suppression was often commensurate with commission and thus sedimented in the foundations of national culture.¹⁶ But perhaps it is more complex than this. Although powerful patterns of denial run like coarse threads through the unfolding drama of Australian land-taking and, over time, come to predominate in the Australian psyche, their victory is always a shifting, tenuous and never total one. For there are, contemporaneously, so many sources that break that silence in order to thwart its intended conspiracy – the words of individual whistle-blowers, both named and anonymous, who need to enter their protests, sometimes stridently, sometimes cautiously; sometimes in small tangential voices, sometimes in persistent and unrelenting ones – against what was regarded in their time as well as our own as being both questionable and unjust: the uncompensated seizure of another's territory, the theft of children, the rape and sexual enslavement of women, the imposition of terror and the manifold, cursory killings of the original inhabitants. These are the kind of historical messengers that today's media love to shoot down. Yet even colonial children's literature, as historian Clare Bradford shows, was prone to declare that 'a war of extermination' was occurring on the frontiers of settlement.¹⁷ In Richard Rowe's *The Boy in the Bush* (1869), the three child protagonists discover that "'civilization" peels off like nose-skin' in the Queensland tropics as ' "Christian" men, and even boys, are ready – eager – to shed blood like water'.¹⁸ 'It is not pleasant to have to write about such things', Rowe admits:

16 Healy 2008; Evans 2008: 195–196.

17 Rowe 1869: 196 in Bradford 2001: 70.

18 Rowe 1869: 195 in Bradford 2001: 6.

but I must if I am to tell the whole truth about Australia ... not one of the three felt the slightest scruple in shooting down a black, and then cutting off his head and hanging it *in terrorem* on a tree, as a game keeper nails a hawk to a gable.¹⁹

It is only when 'they get back from the Bush amongst their mothers, sisters ... &c' that they are '*not* eager to talk about what they have done'.²⁰

But, unlike Rowe's fictional children, there are other actors who openly defend themselves as perpetrators, invoking the cause of Empire and race as well as the entitlements of superior civilisation in justification of their deeds; or otherwise writing confessionally in later life in the hope of perhaps some form of release or absolution. Such writings are usually, though not exclusively, reserved for a later date than the deed itself when the chances of prosecution have faded or the repercussions of breaking with the white frontier code of silence are not so inhibiting.

Melbourne-born Christie Palmerston, the raffish North Queensland bushman, is of the former, more boastful kind in compiling an exploration diary that the *Queenslander* newspaper publishes in late 1883. It tells of how he and his 'sooty friend', one of his Melanesian servants, while blazing a track from Mourilyan Harbour near Innisfail to the Herberton tin-fields, encounter 'a big mob of Aborigines' near the North Johnstone River:

coming down a creek towards us, armed with large swords and shields. 'Thank goodness they have no spears!' I muttered, for they looked a formidable lot ... they could not have known the power of resistance the white man had, or they never would have advanced so openly ... reason being a bit beyond these cute creatures, they had to be submitted to the usual ordeal. Their shields may answer very well for the purposes of their wars, but my rifle drilled them as easily as if they had been sheets of paper ... my black companion did not understand the use of firearms, but carried a long scrub knife; he was an athletic fellow and fought like a demon. Between us we made terrible havoc before the enemy gave way.

In the aftermath of this assault on the Mamu people, Palmerston notices 'a little boy running away':

I soon overtook him, and, laying the barrel of my rifle gently against his neck, shoved him over. He seemed struck with terror and amazement,

19 Rowe 1869: 196 in Bradford 2001: 40.

20 Bradford 2001: 6.

biting me, spitting and [shouting]. In my present garb I should have been an object of terror to a child of my own race – only a shirt and cartridge belt on, my legs bespattered with blood.

Palmerston here reveals himself stripped for aggressive action much like Native Police troopers about to affect a frontier dispersal. He next pitches camp ‘close by the dead blacks’.²¹ Although, as is usual in such accounts, the casualty rate is masked, Palmerston writes in a conscience-free, declamatory style and with a flamboyant openness, knowing he is not likely to be prosecuted by the Queensland colonial authorities for publicly self-confessed murder and child-abduction in a major newspaper. Significantly too, Palmerston is not so depicted in his *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, where he is described as being ‘on unusually close terms with the Aborigines whose allegiance he won by his firmness and skill as a shot’.²² Archibald Meston, later to become Queensland’s Southern Protector of Aborigines, protested against Palmerston’s account, but only to question his prowess as a trail-blazer.²³ For Meston too would boast of the number of Aborigines he had killed at the Barron River and on Dunk Island.²⁴

Writing in a more confessional mode, though at times lapsing into self-justificatory bluster, Dover-born butcher, Korah Halcomb Wills provides a similarly arresting insight into the mind-set of a white frontier perpetrator. Following the old colonial’s death in England in 1896, his extraordinary document was eventually found in an attic in Woking, Surrey and transferred, via British Columbia, back to Queensland in 1986. One wonders whether such a manuscript would have survived if left behind in Bowen where much of the action occurs. Wills writes with minimal punctuation in a hurried, distracted, stream-of-consciousness manner as though unburdening himself of something unspeakable before dying. Yet there is also a brazen defensiveness in his account as it lurches between bravado and apologetics. After arriving in Bowen from Victoria in 1862, Wills recalls, many were the dispersing ‘expeditions ... I have been in and many are the curiosities that I have picked up in the camps of the Natives wild as they ever were, and perfectly rude and cannibals [sic] into the bargain’.²⁵ He particularly enjoyed:

21 Palmerston 1883: 557; Robinson 2008: 72.

22 Bolton 1974: 395–396.

23 *Brisbane Courier*, 30 July 1883.

24 Reid 2006: 146.

25 Wills, Korah 1895, ‘Reminiscence’, Brandon Papers [hereafter BP], Oxley Memorial Library [hereafter OML], OM75/75/3: 109.

the fish we used to find in some of the Natives 'Gunyahs' Crabs, Crawfish and Whitebait by dillybags-full (Buckets) oh the gorges we used to have at such times, that is all those who had the nerve or stomach to do so, and I must say that I revelled in it and so did the Black Native Police.²⁶

The term 'dispersal', he cautiously explains:

was a name given for something not to be mentioned here, but it had to be done for the protection of our own hearths and Wives and families, & you may be sure we were not backward in doing what we were ordered to do and what our forefathers would have done to keep possession of the soil that was laying to waste and no good being done with it when we our own white people were crying for room to stretch our legs on ... we have got the Country and may we for ever hold it for we want it for the good of the whole civilized world ... we have risked our lives ... in arresting it from the savage.²⁷

Though Wills admitted that 'in my time they were dispersed by hundreds if not by thousands', he reiterated that such 'dispersing ... must be done very much on the quiet'. At Bowen, in the 1860s, if reinforcements were required for a Native Police reprisal raid against the Juru and Bindal peoples, the Lieutenant – or from 1864 the Inspector – would 'resort to seeking for Volunteers, men who he thought he could trust for pluck and a quiettongue after all was over'. Wills was 'one of the first he used to drop in on' for he had been a member of the Victorian Volunteer Mounted Rifles before migrating to Queensland and being presented with a new Patent Terry's breech-loading rifle at a testimonial dinner in his honour at St Kilda. The Native Police Officer, Wills continued:

[would] select half a dozen fellows the staunchest he could find & press them into the service for the time being ... as Special Constables & put [them] under arms ... and off we would go for the scene of the outrage [meaning an Aboriginal attack on white enterprise or personnel] wheresoever it might be & to run the Culprits Down & disperse them...²⁸

This combination of white vigilantes and black troopers was essentially illegal, as colonial authorities attempted to prevent the possibility of European witnesses being present at Native Police attacks on other Aboriginal peoples. Troopers themselves were unable to offer evidence until after 1884.²⁹

26 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 154.

27 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 107.

28 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 106–107; *St Kilda Chronicle*, 23 August 1861.

29 Evans 2007: 139.

Yet Wills's account keeps returning to one particular 'dispersal' he attended, conducted with 'a few squatters and their friends', probably in the mid-1860s, not long after he had been elected as Bowen's Mayor. For there is something here, it would seem, that the ailing Wills needs to exorcise. He writes:

the blacks had been playing up & killing a shepherd & robbing his hut when we turned out & run them to earth when they got on the top of a big mound & defied us & smacked their buttocks at us & hurled large stones down on us & hid themselves behind large trees & huge rocks but some paid dearly for their bravado. They had no idea that we could reach them to a dead certainty at a distance of a mile with our little patent breach loading "Terry's" when they were brought to bear on them some of them jumped I am sure six feet into the air...³⁰

Closing in on 'one of these mobs of Blacks', Wills next:

selected a little girl with the intention of civilizing & one of my friends thought he would select a boy for the same purpose & in the selection of which [sic] I stood a very narrow chance of being flattened out by a 'Nulla Nulla' from I presume the Mother of the Child I had hold of, but I received the blow from the deadly weapon across my arm which I threw up to protect my head and my Friend who has since been connected with the Government of the Colony & has held the high office of Chief Immigration Commissioner and protector of the Blacks ... in my time was a kidnapper to the hilt.³¹

Not content with his young trophy, however, Wills next decides to put his pork butchering skills into effect. 'I took it in my head', he writes:

to get a few specimens of certain limbs and head of a Black fellow, which was not a very delicate operation I can tell you. I shall never forget the time when I first found the subject I intended to anatomize, when my friends were looking on, and I commenced operations dissecting. I went to work business-like to take off the head first, & then the Arms and then the legs, and gathered them together and put them into my Pack saddle and one of my friends who I am sure had dispersed more than any other man in the Colony made the remark that if he was offered a fortune he could not do what I had done. His name was Peter Armstrong a well known pioneer in the North of Queensland and pluck enough to face 100 blacks single handed any day as long as he had his revolver with him and his Rifle but that beat him he said.³²

30 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3.

31 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3.

32 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 111–113.

On the following afternoon as his friends were bathing and fishing at 'the Lagoons' on the station, Wills was again hard at work nearby, divesting the severed limbs of their flesh. He continues:

I got pretty well [on] with it until it became dark and I had to give up the unholy job, & we went back to the Station for supper & yarns, and pipes, and night caps of Whiskey before turning in ... I had not been turned in long before I had such dreadful pains in my stomach that I thought I should have died & so did all my friends it was something awful until I could not speak for pain and my inside running out from me and I was quite unable to stop it and they all but gave me up for a dead-un ... I managed to get over it ... but was left very weak indeed. I believe it was a perfect shock to my system by doing such a horrible repulsive thing as I had been doing but I was not going to be done out of my specimens of humanity...³³

With the bones and skull in his saddle bags, he then rides eighty miles back into Bowen with 'my little protegee [sic] of a girl ... who rode on the front of my saddle ... and crying nearly all the way'. As he nears the township, he meets 'different people who hailed me with how do and so on and where did you get that intelegent [sic] little nigger from'.³⁴

Not long afterwards, Sir George Nares, the Arctic explorer visits Bowen and displays an Armstrong gun in the town. Not to be outdone, Wills exhibits, in his words:

My Skull (pard-o-n my blackfellows [skull]) arms and legs to the disgust of many. I remember I had to cover them up with a flag, the Union Jack and if anyone wished to see what was under that flag they had to ask the favor of one of the committee who were afraid the Ladies might get a shock if they left it uncovered ... it was a grand success in a monetary point of view & I think it was for the benefit of the [Bowen] hospital [of which Wills had been elected President of the Board in May 1864].³⁵

In relation to the unnamed, stolen child, Wills tells others that he had 'picked her up in the Bush lost to her own tribe and crying her heart out'. And 'so', he continues, as if this were now the accepted story:

I took compassion on her and decided to take her home & bring her up with my own children, which I did and even sent her to school with my own and when I went to Melbourne I took her there to place her at Boarding School with my eldest daughter [Georgiana] who was there

33 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 114–116.

34 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 116–117.

35 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 130.

but she took a severe cold and I had the Doctor to her who ... said ... the climate was too cold for her and that she would be dead in less than a month and he made me take her back again into her own climate when he said I doubt if she will ever recover even there so I had to bring her back again and she never lost her cold and eventually it carried her off, so much for my trying to civilize the aboriginals.³⁶

I have stayed at length with Korah Wills, allowing his graphically nonchalant words to tell a story with little editorial intervention, as I wish to emphasise both its exceptional and banal nature. Wills was a typical self-made colonial male on the frontiers of settlement who stood unsuccessfully for the Queensland Legislative Assembly in late 1866 against George Elphinstone Dalrymple, another fervent frontier activist and a founder of Bowen. Wills served as Bowen's mayor in 1865 and 1867, and was later elected as the mayor of Mackay in 1876–1877. He corresponded with the Queensland Acclimatization Society and was the proprietor of Bowen's largest hotel. By the early 1880s he owned a string of Wills' Hotels throughout Queensland before retiring permanently to England in 1886.³⁷ In London, he attended annual banquets of prominent Queenslanders where he sat at table with such well-known planters as Charles Rawson and Harold Finch-Hatton, leading squatters such as Arthur Hodgson, Edward Weinholt and Oscar De Satge, and famous colonial officials such as Sir George Bowen and Sir James Cockle. Here they listened to speeches, such as that delivered by Sir Edward Sandys Dawes, who in June 1895, as Wills was writing his startling memoir, spoke fondly to the assembly of former Queensland Premier, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, who would entertain London dinner-guests with stories of Aboriginal cannibalism and aver 'that he would undertake to disperse an army of them with a stockwhip (laughter)'.³⁸

Wills was thus no loner, outsider or gun- and knife-toting eccentric. He was part of the land-holding establishment of Queensland and shared strong, elitist views on, for instance, *fin-de-siecle* working class radicals whom he denounced as 'low and scurrilous scum'.³⁹ Though he may, to our present ears, sound exceptional, he was not. His opinions, and even his actions were largely within the tolerated mainstream of his time. Bowen's newspaper, the *Port Denison Times* advocated in 1867 the taking of 50 Aboriginal lives for every white casualty.⁴⁰ Wills's conscienceless killing of Aborigines was replicated across the colony as was his blatant child abduction activity, as Shirleene Robinson's recent book, *Something Like Slavery* makes painfully clear. Even his corpse dissection was

36 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 117–118.

37 Frankland to Evans, 5 May 1986; Brandon to Frankland, 14 April 1986; *Brisbane Courier*, 24 June 1864, 2 August 1865, 6 July 1867.

38 Queenslanders at Dinner, June 1890–June 1895 (cuttings), BP, OML: 52–85.

39 Wills, 1895, 'Reminiscence', BP, OML, OM75/75/3: 209–210; *Brisbane Courier*, 11 September 1894.

40 *Port Denison Times*, 2 March 1867.

not particularly anomalous if we consider the skeletal collections of deceased Aborigines in museums throughout Europe, Britain and Australia. Three of the visiting scientists, Karl Lumholtz, Richard Semon and probably Amalie Dietrich, encountered Queensland settlers who offered to shoot an Aborigine for them so they might obtain the skull. Archibald Meston, the subsequent architect of Queensland's *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897*, wrote in 1887 to Edward Ramsey, the curator of Sydney's Australia Museum, 'Re skulls &c, skeletons of the festive myall! ... At your prices I could have procured about £2000 worth in the last six years. I shall start on the warpath again! Hope to succeed in slaughtering some stray skeleton for you'.⁴¹

Wills's beliefs about blood and soil were also hegemonic as was his conception of what was implied in his time by the term 'civilising'. On his journey to Bowen in 1862, he had detoured to visit those shrines of pioneering sacrifice, Hornet Bank and Cullin-la-Ringo, sites of the Fraser and Wills massacres respectively. The deaths of Korah Wills' Victorian namesake, Horatio Wills and 18 others of his party had only just occurred in mid-October 1861, several months before the former's visit, and white reprisal activity was doubtlessly still continuing in the region. Horatio Wills had formerly been a settler of the Grampians of Western Victoria and had himself been involved, along with his workers, in the massacre of Aborigines. Emily Wills, Horatio's wife, wrote to her brothers in Germany just before Christmas 1861 that 300 blacks, 'Gins and all' had been slaughtered in retaliation: 'hunted like wild dogs', she added with undisguised relish. 'I hope you read your bibles often', her letter concludes.⁴²

This then was the asymmetrical milieu of frontier destruction – of violent resistance and disproportional counter-killings – within which frontiersmen such as Palmerston and Korah Wills operated. It is a painful and distressing world for contemporary Australians to re-enter, for it reconnoitres the dark continent within the human spirit that the savage process of dispossession tends to draw out. The *Quadrant* day-trips to 'Fantasy Island' will continue to provide a welcome detour for many. Yet the only aspect of the phenomenon of Korah Wills that is truly exceptional is his compulsion for such detailed, self-incriminating disclosure, as his guilty words literally tumble over each other in their eagerness to escape his pen. Others in his time left less revealing fragments concerning reprisals they had attended. Overall these also reinforce Boyce's point that today's race conflict historians, if anything, provide a pale reflection of the struggle rather than embellishing or fabricating it. In 1865, for instance, EO Hobkirk, 'an old identity of South Western Queensland' was present at a mass killing of Aborigines on the Bulloo River after an Aboriginal

41 Lumholtz 1889: 373; Semon 1899: 266–267; Turnbull 2008: 231–232.

42 De Moore 2008: 122.

worker, described as a 'pet black boy', murdered John Dowling, the manager of Thouringowa Station. His brother, Vincent gathered a white posse to secure the culprit, but when local Aborigines would not provide information – to quote Hobkirk:

Mr. Dowling then said, 'if you do not tell me I will shoot the lot of yous'. Still they remained silent. Mr. Dowling and the others then set to work and put an end to many of them, not touching the 'gins' and young fry. This I know to be true as I helped first to burn the bodies and then to bury them. A most unpleasant undertaking! But as I was only a 'Jackaroo' on 'Cheshunt' station at the time, I had to do what I was told.⁴³

Vincent Dowling had earlier been a pioneering cattleman on the Upper Darling River in 1859. His head stockman, John Edward Kelly later provided graphic descriptions of atrocities visited by white settlers on the local Aboriginal peoples. 'We feel perfectly certain that we have not exaggerated one single statement we have made', Kelly concluded his account: 'We have seen the bones'.⁴⁴

The memorably named John Charles Hogsflesh was working as principal mail contractor on the Palmer River track in October 1874, when he discovered the mutilated bodies of German goldminer Johann Straub, his wife Bridget and young daughter Annie. These two females were the first known white women killed by Aborigines in North Queensland. A massive reprisal, involving squads of Native Police troopers led by Second-Class Inspector Thomas Clohesy, Acting Inspector Tom Coward, Sub-Inspector Edwin Townshend and Acting Sub-Inspector Alexander Douglas, reinforced by white civilian volunteers, culminated in a large-scale massacre of Aborigines at Skull Camp.⁴⁵ One of these volunteers, WH Corfield wrote that any compunction he felt towards mercy during the operation evaporated when he thought of the 'outrages' committed on the German family.⁴⁶ But Hogsflesh, who was probably also German himself and 'unfortunately' sworn in as 'an Especial Constable', as he put it, later reported that although he 'was Present [sic] at the Skull Camp Massacre – it was nothing else – I was not a Participant. I could not do it'. If a book were written on the ill-treatment of North Queensland's Aborigines, he continued, it would represent 'one of the blackest pages in the History of Queensland'. 'I hope it never will [be written]' he added cautiously. For Skull Camp was, he maintained, basing his conclusion on 25 years frontier experience, 'only

43 Copland et al 2006: 77–78; Richards 2008: 67.

44 *The Stockwhip*, 22 April 1876; *Maryborough Chronicle*, 9 May 1876; Evans, R 2009: 10.

45 Richards 2008: 292–293.

46 Evans et al 1993: 52–53, 128.

one case. I could fill this sheet with similar. One is sufficient to Repeat. The sickening Details is best forgotten'.⁴⁷ Hogsflesh's letter to Queensland Premier, Boyd Morehead, was filed away, unanswered.

Writing in the *Cairns Post* in 1926, Michael O'Leary recalled how in the mid-1880s he camped at Skeleton Creek, near the Mulgrave River, where 'nearly every stump or tree had a nigger's skull as a trophy ... When we made camp, I strolled round and counted sixteen of these gruesome relics'.⁴⁸ Historian Timothy Bottoms believes this Golgotha was connected with the 'big "battue"' (a hunting term denoting a round-up for destruction) conducted near Cairns against the Yidinydji people in 1884–1885. One participant, Jack Kane later told anthropologist Norman Tindale how combined Native Police and colonists' raids, lasting a week, slaughtered Aborigines at Skull Pocket, along the Mulgrave River and at Woree. Tindale recorded in his diary:

each man [was] armed with a rifle and revolver. At dawn one man fired into their camp [at Skull Pocket] and the natives rushed away in three other directions. They were easy running shots close up. The native police rushed in with their scrub knives and killed off the children. A few years later a man loaded up a whole case of skulls and took them away as specimens. [Kane added matter-of-factly,] 'I didn't mind the killing of the "bucks" but I didn't quite like them braining the kids'...⁴⁹

There is a striking congruity in these abrasive stories that are told, almost calmly, by voices that echo from and relate back into a different kind of normalcy from our own. This is, I would contend, the normalcy of a world of undeclared ethnic warfare, fought pre-emptively and ferociously, with no declared rules of engagement or agreed parameters. It is a territorial, unscrupulous, terrorising, scrappy and dirty conflict, replete with genocidal incidents. In many areas it appears to have been fought almost to the finish – and these candid perpetrator and witness stories match in their flavour the accusatory reports of colonial whistle-blowers who in larger numbers write, mostly anonymously to the press, invariably fruitlessly to the Queensland government and with occasional, glancing success to the British Colonial Office or the Aborigines Protection Society. Indeed, it is possible to argue that in composite, the degree of colonial disclosure of frontier excesses occurring in Queensland more or less balances the on-going degree of stone-walling and denialism. Though there is usually an element of circumspection regarding the identity of involved personnel and other condemnatory details such as the precise number of Aboriginal casualties, the accumulated evidence unfolds a continually reiterated and virtually

47 Hogsflesh, John to Morehead, Boyd, 8 October 1889, Queensland State Archives [hereafter QSA], Col A595, in-letter 9567.

48 *Cairns Post*, 1 November 1926; Bottoms 2000: 122.

49 Bottoms 2000: 121–123.

inescapable story of desperate resistance and ruthless suppression. Although a cloak of secrecy and euphemism usually accompanied the illegal commission of individual or group killings and most participants wisely held their counsel, the cloak was porous. Sometimes perpetrators boasted, confessed or left cryptic clues regarding their actions. Sometimes those actions were witnessed by others and the private circulation of damning information was made public by a colonial whistle-blower. The principal source of a more disciplined silence was institutional in nature. It involved a colonial police service that not only did not investigate most violent Aboriginal deaths as crime scenes, but also actually took part in and often directed massacres. And it consequently involved a colonial legal service that played little part in extending the rule of law to frontier regions in relation to ubiquitous Aboriginal casualties at the hands of others. Though the potential for law enforcement was ever-present, imposing caution in the reportage of wrong-doing, it was rarely effected. The only non-Aboriginal ever executed for the murder of an Aborigine in Queensland was a Chilean sailor, Leonardo Moncardo, in 1892 for the killing of a Darwin Aboriginal child named Bob on a trading boat off Thursday Island. It was more of a work-place incident than a frontier one.⁵⁰

For much of the nineteenth century therefore, the principal source of denialism concerning frontier violence was invariably official in origin and was, overall, out of step with virtually every other form of reportage on the subject. Disclaimers and rebuttals by the Queensland government regarding reported atrocities rarely appeared to be believed by the colonial press; but, aided by a swelling migrant population who usually seem to be unconcerned as to the fate of Aborigines, or openly hostile towards them, politicians and bureaucrats maintained a constant barrage of disavowal and repudiation. As the persistent Catholic activist for Aboriginal protection, Father Duncan McNab was informed by a Government Minister in November 1880, 'Nineteen-twentieths of the population ... care nothing about them, and the other twentieth regard them as a nuisance to be got rid of'.⁵¹

Even though Queensland from 1859 was a self-governing colony, responsible for its own internal order, its various governments were at pains to deflect criticism from Whitehall and avoid Colonial Office scrutiny and rebuke on matters of racial policy. Defending its international reputation in a British Empire that promoted civilised sanctity was crucial. Private reports of frontier atrocities reaching Britain were deflected by the Queensland authorities as being concocted and inauthentic. Reassurances were given that everything conceivable was being done to offer Aboriginal peoples just terms. For instance, in July 1865, the Queensland Executive Council assured the Colonial Office that, as well as its

50 Dawson 2005: 35.

51 Evans et al 1993: 79.

annual blanket distribution, 'medical assistance' and even 'grants of land' were being offered to Aborigines. 'The question of the general amelioration of their condition by founding special hospitals for them, and industrial schools for their children, has repeatedly engaged the attention of the Colonial Government and Parliament',⁵² the report continued. The 'grants of land' in question were actually for Christian missionary societies who never availed themselves of the offer. The rest of the assurances were simply specious window-dressing. Official documentation in Queensland, rather than delivering the most dependable of interpretations to posterity, is probably the most suspect.

Official circumlocution was passed on down the line. For instance, during the overlanding expedition of Frank and Alexander Jardine from Rockhampton to Somerset at the tip of Cape York between August 1864 and January 1865, there were 11 encounters with various Aboriginal groups along the way and, in at least nine of these, Aborigines were killed.⁵³ Following an affray on 16 December 1864, the Government Surveyor accompanying the Jardines and four Native Police troopers reported that the brothers were 'attacked by some natives, whom they soon put to flight'.⁵⁴ The Jardine's private journal discloses more fulsomely that 'eight or nine' Aborigines were killed.⁵⁵ Two days later, in a more severe clash at the Mitchell River, the Surveyor, Archibald Richardson again writes of the over-mastered Aborigines, 'Many of them lost the number of their mess, but none of our party were hit'.⁵⁶ The Jardines, however, frankly disclose:

The natives at first stood up courageously, but either by accident or through fear, despair or stupidity, they got huddled in a heap, in, and at the margin of the water, when ten carbines poured volley after volley into them from all directions, killing and wounding with every shot with very little return ... About thirty being killed ... [m]any more must have been wounded and probably drowned, for fifty-nine rounds were counted as discharged.⁵⁷

It would, of course, be excerpts from Surveyor Richardson's diary that found their way to Britain, though even his tight-lipped reportage encountered official disquiet there.

A pattern of denial, however, was certainly gaining the upper hand throughout Australian society as Federation approached. Sir Horace Tozer, Queensland's

52 Queensland Executive Council to British Colonial Office, 4 July 1865, Public Records Office, Kew, Co 234/12, 57283.

53 Loos 1982: 252–253.

54 Hiddens 1994: 152.

55 Hiddens 1994: 48.

56 Hiddens 1994: 153.

57 Hiddens 1994: 50.

Agent General in London and a former Colonial Secretary, wrote in the *Empire Review* in 1901 that Aboriginal numbers had declined simply due to 'civilization and its vices'. Frontier deaths were the result of the 'tribal conflicts' of 'cannibals'.⁵⁸ George Frodsham, the Anglican Bishop of North Queensland, added poetically that Aborigines were dying out because they had 'shuddered at the approach of the stranger'. They were now 'flitting silently and quickly into the limbo of forgotten races'.⁵⁹ White agency apparently had little to do with it: Aborigines were so 'very low in the intellectual scale of humanity'⁶⁰ that all they could absorb was moral degradation. In short, they were, individually and collectively, killing themselves. Australian children's literature now also began to emphasise silence and concealment. Mrs Aeneas Gunn's *The Little Black Princess of the Never Never* (1905) was silent on frontier violence while Ethel Turner's *Seven Little Australians* was re-tooled between 1894 and 1900 to eliminate 'the shadow of ... sorrowful history' from the text.⁶¹ Turner in 1894 had included the Aboriginal narrative of Tettawonga in her book, prefacing it with a reference to the 'nightmare' of 'evil' that white intrusion had brought. This section of text was excised from all subsequent editions. School *Readers* inculcated collective amnesia by presenting a land 'entirely empty of inhabitants' before the British arrival.⁶² Federation poetry, celebrating the ethical *bona fides* of the new nation, trumpeted a theme of constant peace:

We have no records of a bygone shame.
No red-writ histories of woe to weep.⁶³

claimed poet John Farrell; while Banjo Paterson in 'How the Land Was Won' reiterated:

we have no songs of strife,
Of bloodshed reddening the land.⁶⁴

Yet it was, pre-eminently, the Queensland poet, Toowoomba-based George Essex Evans who earned Federation's title of Australia's 'patriotic poet'⁶⁵ by winning the prize for the best commemorative verse with his 'Commonwealth Ode'. In this poem, much admired by Alfred Deakin, Evans depicts Australia as a land 'empty, memoryless and unproductive' before the British arrival.⁶⁶ It then blossoms to become:

58 Tozer 1901: 183–184.

59 Frodsham 1915: 195, 213.

60 Creed 1905: 89.

61 Gunn 1905: 21, Turner 1894: 10 in Bradford 2001: 3–5, 15, 91.

62 Bradford 2001: 21–28.

63 Farrell 1887: 29; Hirst 2000: 21.

64 Evans 2002: 182.

65 Mackenzie-Smith 2001: 67.

66 Tiffin 1991: 71.

Free-born of Nations, Virgin white,
Not won by blood nor ringed with steel.
Thy throne is on a loftier height,
Deep-rooted in the Commonweal!⁶⁷

It is similar in tone to other poems Evans wrote, such as 'A Federal Song', 'Stand Forth, O Daughter of the Sun', 'An Australian Symphony' and 'The Women of the West', all extolling pioneering virtues and summoning the new nation into being. In sentiment, this was in basic conformity with the general literary industry of its time, intent upon fashioning a new kind of reality about Antipodean honour and innocence. Yet we might expect that Essex Evans, of all such writers, should have known better.

When Evans wrote his Ode in 1900, he was married to Blanche Hopkins, the sister of former Native Police Officer, Second-Class Sub-Inspector Ernest Eglinton.⁶⁸ Eglinton was based at the Boulia Native Police camp from 1878 to 1884, after which he became a local Police Magistrate. He was involved in numerous patrols across the inner Gulf region around Cloncurry and oversaw the near elimination of the Kalkadoon people. In early 1879 he carried out reprisals after Kalkadoons had ambushed and killed Russian cattleman, Bernard Molvo and three others of his party at Woonamo waterhole in Sulieman Creek, leading to 'constant shoot-outs' throughout that year.⁶⁹ He next avenged the killing of Native Police cadet, Constable Marcus La Poer Beresford and several of his troopers in January 1883, eventually fighting a battle against the Kalkadoons with an armed posse of white squatters in April.⁷⁰ One account claims that 'scores of blacks were killed'. Another settler, Robert Clarke, writing in 1901, offered an even higher casualty rate, with the Native Police 'in their glory shooting down everything'.⁷¹ A memoir Eglinton wrote in 1920 about the 'exceedingly cruel' Kalkadoons mentions little of this. Most violence is from the Aboriginal side of the frontier (though sometimes caused by white cruelty and 'Gin-stealing'), while tales of Native Police 'ferocity and cruelty' are dismissed as a product of 'the gentle art of leg-pulling'.⁷²

Significantly, George Essex Evans was himself located in the same region as his future brother-in-law in the early 1880s, having joined a surveying party that left Warwick on the Darling Downs for Dalgona Station on Julia Creek, north-east of Cloncurry, in mid-March 1883. The surveyors, under the leadership of Gilbert Daveney and his cousin James Daveney Steele, were photographed

67 Evans 1900: 1–2; Byrnes and Vallis 1959: 40–41.

68 O'Hagan 1981: 446–447; Richards 2008: 233.

69 Loos 1982: 224; *Queenslander*, 8 March 1879.

70 Hillier, nd, "'If You Leave Me Alone...'", unpublished ms: 121.

71 Laurie 1959: 70; Armstrong nd: 128.

72 Eglinton, 1920, 'Pioneering in the North-West...', Mitchell Library, ms: 1–8.

during the long expedition heavily armed. One of the party sports a bandolier of bullets around his body. In a short recollection, entitled 'Memories of the Gulf', written in 1926, Steele records violent encounters with his 'blackboy' while at Dalgona, adding darkly, 'Subsequently the Inspector of Native Police looked after him'.⁷³ The officer was probably Eglinton himself. Steele later acted as Best Man at the Burketown wedding of James Lamond, a Sub-Inspector of Native Police who, in 1885, would inform Frank Hann of Lawn Hill that '[t]he police have shot ... round this run alone over 100 blacks in three years'.⁷⁴

It beggars belief that Essex Evans was somehow innocent of any knowledge of such concerted mayhem when he wrote his epochal tribute to the 'quiet continent' in 1900. He had, in effect, stretched poetic licence beyond its elastic limit. Further investigation shows that the poet published a humorous article entitled 'My Gulf Helmet' concerning his Cloncurry surveying experience under the pseudonym of 'Christophus' in *The Antipodean*, a literary journal he co-edited in 1894. In this he details his preparation to travel into 'the country of the rude and untutored Myall':

I had an excellent outfit. We were going far from the haunts of civilization, amongst the savages of the North. 'It is well to be prepared', the Boss said. I was prepared. I was clad in a war-like and elegant costume. I wore long leather gaiters and long fierce spurs. Round my waist was strapped an empty but formidable cartridge belt ... in front of the saddle was a bulky valise and revolver in a strapped case. On the right of the saddle hung a tomahawk ... quite a group of little boys ... called me 'Lord Wolseley' ... My appearance was so military.⁷⁵

The central thrust of the story concerns Essex Evans' overly large pith helmet. 'I could see nothing but green lining when I had it on', he writes; but he clearly required no such helmet to restrict his later vision.⁷⁶ His poetry championed aversion to any themes of negativity in the colonial story. 'An Australian Symphony', for instance, seeks to banish all 'mournful' cultural 'undertones' from the national refrain:

These mangrove shores, these shimmering seas,
This summer zone –
Shall they inspire no nobler strain
Than songs of bitterness and pain?

73 Steele 1926: 9–10.

74 Roberts 2005: 232; Slack 2002: 79, 81.

75 Evans 1894: 107.

76 Evans 1894: 107, 109–110, 112.

Evans demands that Australia's music requires 'a loftier tone':

Her song is silence: unto her
Its mystery clings.
Silence is the interpreter
Of deeper things.⁷⁷

And, one might add, also the censor.

Such concealment became a dominant reflex during the twentieth century as a major psychological problem with national accountability was generated. Its effects were wide-ranging and, for most white Australians, inclusive and enduring. Convictism and colonialism were both spring-cleaned of telling stains for the consumption of these innocent invaders, as 'the Great Australian Silence' grew more pervasive. Aborigines themselves became a vanishing race in the wider Australian mind. The engine of this cultural amnesia remained principally institutional in nature as a selective process of forgetting was fostered both educationally and politically. Saying little or nothing about Aborigines and their fate was simultaneously saying much about British-Australians and their sense of self-worth. As the *Queensland School Reader* (Book six), studied by generations of students, fulsomely declaimed about George Essex Evans:

His muse delights in imperialism – a true and lofty imperialism which, while ever ready to defend its own, does not glory in the smoke and scarlet of war, but prefers to extend its borders by the influence of righteous rule, and finds its ideals in Empire-builders such as Raleigh and Cook, Rhodes and Grey, and in the countless host of brave pioneers the world over, who have blazed tracks of civilisation across new countries, founded prosperous cities, and won in quiet heroism the splendid victories of Peace.⁷⁸

In Queensland during this time most of the Native Mounted Police records disappeared. Although historian Jonathan Richards, who has painstakingly scoured the Queensland State Archives for all Native Police references, has recently concluded that, 'it is no longer acceptable to allege that there are no [such] records' and dismisses claims of missing files as 'conspiracy theories', it nevertheless appears clear that a vast culling of sensitive items has at some point occurred.⁷⁹ Most of the surviving records are scattered in departmental holdings other than that of the Police Department and Police Commissioner's Office where, all being above board, they should belong. The vast majority of these extant files are relatively innocuous Police Staff records, though even a

77 Evans 2009: 3.

78 Fowles 1913: 6.

79 Richards 2008: 207.

considerable number of these are also missing. Thus, although Richards' recently published *The Secret War* throws new light on the organisation and rationale of the Native Mounted Police Force and the career trajectories of certain of its white personnel, it usually pulls up short when it arrives at action in the field. This is because, as another researcher, Robert Jensen has found – and my own work over the years would corroborate – even though:

collisions between police and native tribes were regularly reported ... it is equally clear that only scattered remnants of these reports survive...

[These are] largely preserved in the Department of the Colonial Secretary where they *do not* naturally belong, rather than where they *ought to have been* amongst the files from the Police Department.⁸⁰

The most sensitive of such missing documents are the regular 'monthly reports' required from all officers, outlining the date and particulars of every collision and dispersal that had transpired while on patrol. Such orders were first released in 1861 and strongly reinforced by the 1866 Native Police Regulations that demanded both a field journal and duty diary be kept. Jensen states, 'evidence shows that the Government printer made a specific Native Police Officers Diary with columns for this purpose and ... officers are on record for ordering these diaries'.⁸¹ Given that some 85 Native Police camps operated between 1859 and 1900, for an average space of seven years apiece, there should ideally be over 7000 of these monthly reports in existence. Yet only a handful remain. It is like a huge jigsaw puzzle with most of the vital middle pieces removed. The challenge is to use these missing pieces like a musician uses silence.

As both Richards and Jensen conclude, 'incomplete ... records ... prevent us from being able to count the actual number of killing episodes' or the precise numbers killed.⁸² Yet there may be a way of arriving at a roughly reliable estimate – or at least a defensible minimum – of Native Police killings between 1859 and 1898, when Queensland's *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* became law. As stated above, we know from Richards' work that 85 camps were established in this time as well as the number of years that each one operated. Such camps reached a numerical peak of 42 during the 1870s when frontier relations in the north and west of Queensland intensified and troopers received breech-loading Snider Rifles that multiplied fire-power five times over the previous muzzle-loading Carbines. By the 1890s, the number of camps had fallen to 20, located largely in the Cape and Gulf. If we delete the Frome camp on the Palmer River that began in 1898 from our consideration, we have a total of 84 camps operating for an aggregate of some 596 years – or roughly seven years

80 Jensen, 2007, 'What Does the Archived Records Reveal...', unpublished ms: 2–3.

81 Jensen, 2007, 'What Does the Archived Records Reveal...', unpublished ms: 1.

82 Richards 2008: 207; Jensen, 2007, 'What Does the Archived Records Reveal...', unpublished ms: 4.

per camp.⁸³ From these camps, Native Police detachments conducted monthly patrols, visiting pastoral stations and mining fields in their ambit region and carrying out desultory dispersals of Aboriginal groups encountered in order to pre-empt or avenge depredations. Richards writes, 'usually between three and eight troopers were led by a European officer, although occasionally double detachments ... were worked by one or two officers. Sometimes, the patrols were continual' as in the case of the so-called 'Flying Detachments' set up in 1868.⁸⁴ As the 1864 Regulations candidly stated, 'the duties of the officers are never-ending; their presence is required everywhere ... all gatherings of aboriginals in the neighbourhood may be followed by the police, and disarmed and dispersed by force'.⁸⁵ Sometimes, too, more than one patrol might be underway in a region when more than one officer was present or when that region was in a state of enhanced alert. Yet, if we assume only one patrol per month, we are still looking at a potential aggregate of 7152 patrols. Let us strip this back further, however, to a rounded figure of 6000 patrols, in consideration of times of illness, desertion, flooding or other natural disasters when patrolling might be curbed; as well as to recognise any months in a year when a camp may have folded or not yet begun its operations. This would suggest an average of ten patrol reports per year rather than 12.

But how can we assess the number of collisions with Aborigines per patrol if the vast bulk of the monthly reports have gone missing? Luckily, a small number of these have survived among the Colonial Secretary's files and elsewhere, allowing one to compile a case study of such circuits from 1865 to 1884. From available data, I have collected 22 monthly accounts of rounds across areas of central and north-eastern Queensland, as well as in the Gulf country. These reports represent the activities of 11 Native Police Officers in eight regions across three decades. During these patrols, such Officers enumerate 57 collisions with or dispersals of Aborigines – an average of 2.6 such engagements per patrol.⁸⁶ Even if, for the sake of caution, we again drop this back to two dispersals on average per patrol, we still arrive at an aggregate projection of roughly 12,000 dispersals by Native Police alone between 1859 and 1897. How many Aborigines then were killed, on average in each dispersal? Mostly officers are careful not to enumerate such casualties with any precision, although various records do again provide an actual, though not necessarily an accurate figure. As researcher Alan Hillier comments, 'most of the deaths were never reported ... as the Native Police

83 Richards 2005: 349–351.

84 Richards 2008: 17; Hillier, nd, "'If You Leave Me Alone...'", unpublished ms: 263.

85 Hillier, nd, "'If You Leave Me Alone...'", unpublished ms: 320–321; Richards 2008: 45.

86 Blakeney, Carr and Nantes, 'Monthly reports: January–June 1866', QSA, Col A 127/2455; Paschen, 'Monthly report, June 1865', QSA, Gov/24; *Port Denison Times*, 16 June 1866; Loos 1982: 43; *Brisbane Courier*, 17 September 1872; Johnstone, 'Monthly report, March 1873', QSA, Col A 184/1430; Hillier, nd, "'If You Leave Me Alone...'", unpublished ms: 219–222, 245–246; Springsure Police Letter Book, 1866–73, QSA, A36–355; Armstrong nd: 136–145; *Courier Mail*, 25 January 2003; Fysh 1961: 144–147.

officers knew better than to send in reports that could [potentially] hang them'.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Police Commissioner from 1864 until 1895, DT Seymour, had no desire to read detailed dispersal accounts. Hillier states, 'Seymour washed his hands of any violence. He maintained his role as overseer of operations, rather than becom[ing] involved in the murky world of [field] activities'.⁸⁸ Yet on the odd occasion that a casualty number is recorded, they range widely from high double figures (and sometimes even triple ones) during extended times of reprisal raiding to smaller group totals, ranging from three to 12 or so during more regular clashes.⁸⁹ Even if we once more play it incredibly safe here and suggest the extremely conservative figure of only two killed on average per dispersal, we find ourselves confronting an aggregate estimate of 24,000 violent Aboriginal deaths at the hands of the Native Police between 1859 and 1897 alone. This, of course, is only a mathematical speculation, but, I would suggest, one that deserves some attention and consideration. It is equally important that such an estimate be understood not only as a bare, debatable statistic but also as a sequential quotient of grief and pain. Furthermore, the surprisingly large figure does not include a prior decade of Native Police patrols and dispersals from 1849 to 1859, or indeed *any* of the private white settler or military assaults on Aborigines from 1824 that may have actually rivalled, in composite, Native Police attacks in their intensity. The maths grow increasingly disquietening. Whatever the overall figure may be – and it will remain forever speculative – it certainly dwarfs Reynolds' controversial 20,000 Aboriginal mortality estimate from frontier violence for the whole of Australia from 1788 to 1930.

Queensland's past appears then to be an ideal locale for burying the so-called 'History Wars' and for composing an epitaph to their essentially wrong-headed, viperish and irrelevant nature. The territory of Queensland equals above two-thirds the size of Europe and contained, pre-contact, arguably around 35 per cent of Australia's Aboriginal population. Its incoming settlers spread themselves across the continent's widest territorial range at a time when both Western weapons-technology and scientific racism were burgeoning. The pattern of frontier relations persisted there for almost a century.⁹⁰

The past is always a puzzle that is never satisfactorily solved, but empirical investigation of Queensland's frontier, even more so than that of Tasmania, appears to disclose that so-called 'Black-Armband' historians, rather than fabricating and exaggerating a violent heritage, have probably down-played

87 Hillier, nd, "If You Leave Me Alone...", unpublished ms: 264.

88 Hillier, nd, "If You Leave Me Alone...", unpublished ms: 268; Thorpe 1985: 254–255.

89 See, for instance, Copland et al 2006: 70; Roberts 2005: 232–233; Loos 1982: 36–37, 41; Armstrong nd: 170–171; Richards 2008: 66–68; Hillier, nd, "If You Leave Me Alone...", unpublished ms: 60, 84, 109, 143, 162, 201; Evans et al 1993: 61, 63, 130–131, 375–378; Evans 2004: 156–157; Collins 2002: 213; de Moore 2008: 122.

90 Evans 2004a: 68–70, 2004b: 162–164.

it with a degree of cautious restraint. Even the self-incriminating perpetrator testimony points in this direction. The Queensland scene did not host any 'Nun's picnics'.⁹¹ Rather it was a locale of fear and devastation. As well as an inordinately high Aboriginal death-rate from physical attack, above 1000 European, Asian and Melanesian mainland colonists died violently. Reynolds' estimate of fatalities, much derided for its alleged excessiveness, apparently requires radical upward revision; and, despite confident neoconservative assertions, official pronouncements on inter-racial matters in Queensland (at least) often seem to be the *least* likely of historical sources to be trusted. Concealment and disclosure about the nature of Imperial dispossession and colonial settlement are locked in an on-going dynamic tension throughout much of our history and this long serpentine dance of contestation requires urgent unravelling. The turn of the millennium was by no means the first time in this country that fervent denialism has mounted its brash and popular challenge.

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91 Manne 2003: 299; *The Australian*, 16 December 2002.

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