BOOK REVIEWS


There is a vast literature on the ill health of Aborigines, mostly ahistorical. An exception is the study made by Eduard J. Beck of the health of Aboriginal children living in 26 town camps round Alice Springs. Camps have existed from the town’s inception and have provided a residence for workers in the pastoral industry. Only in the last decade have they undergone a rapid expansion both in number and population size due to movement from settlements, missions and pastoral stations.

Beck found that the Aboriginal children living in these town camps have a health profile which is more like that of Third World children than that of Australian children. Forty-nine per cent showed signs of under-nutrition, 33 per cent displayed evidence of chronic under-nutrition (low height-for-age) and 39 per cent showed signs of acute under-nutrition (low weight-for-age). The under-five-year-olds were more severely affected than the older children but under-nutrition was not limited to this group. Beck also found that the infection load carried by the children in the camps was high; gastrointestinal and respiratory tract infections were more prevalent in the under-five age group, whereas eye, skin and dental pathology became more prevalent in the older children. Middle ear disease affected all age groups at an approximately similar rate. He found an inverse relationship between nutritional status and infective load. Those who suffered most from growth retardation also bore the biggest burden of infection.

Beck maintains that it is impossible to understand why Aboriginal children are so sick without examining the relationship between their culture, history, present environment, and health. He briefly examines the health of Aboriginal people from pre-contact times until the present and notes that although Aboriginal children were often described as having ‘a distended abdomen and lordotic spine yet they were active and apparently symptomless’, they appeared to be well nourished except in times of drought. With the arrival of Europeans Aborigines were deprived of their land, excluded from the European economy, introduced to diseases to which they had no immunity, to a diet on which they could not be healthy, and to alcohol as a source of consolation for the cultural deprivation that made their life meaningless.

Beck’s research reveals that the environmental conditions of the town camps resemble very much a nineteenth-century picture of the Western world, where many of the early battles for pure water, drainage, sanitation, personal hygiene, adequate personal space and shelter remain to be fought. He found a significant association between the type of dwelling the children lived in and respiratory infection. Thus, the worse the housing the more likely its inhabitants were to contact upper respiratory infections. He also found that the further away housing was from the water source, the more likely were the inhabitants to be malnourished.

Beck found that the unemployment level, like that of other Aboriginal communities, was very high in the town camps. The major source of income was a fortnightly Social Security payment. In the first week a considerable amount of money was spent on alcohol, taxi fares and food. In the second, when money was short, families made do on food with a low
nutritional value. While kinship obligations tended to dissipate the few resources of the town camp inhabitants, nevertheless some groups managed better than others. A number of researchers have shown that the growth of children, especially in the earlier years, is predominantly a function of environmental factors and especially of social and economic forces. Beck also found that differences in acute nutritional status between children from different camps were mainly attributable to different social and economic conditions. Those camps whose children had a better nutritional status were more effective than the others in making use of the economic avenues open to them.

Beck also recognises the relationship between Aboriginal culture and health. He points out that the Aboriginal medical system still operates and that people accept the traditional interpretation of death and disease. He notes that management of disease is now generally treated by traditional healers in conjunction with allopathic medical services. He could have made much more of the cultural chasm that exists between the Western deliverers of health care and its Aboriginal patients, especially as regards ‘women’s business’. Since Beck wrote this book, in Alice Springs Aboriginal women are now trying to recover control of birthing; they are campaigning for their own centre.

Beck stresses that the social and economic conditions found in the town camps do not operate in isolation. They have resulted from the social and economic development of Central Australia. He examines the disastrous effect that military occupation, exploration, mining, agriculture, missionaries, government administration and tourism have had upon the Aboriginal hunter-gatherer economy. Beck believes that Central Australia has a colonial relationship with the industrialised sector of the continent and he maintains that the health patterns of the children of the town camps are ultimately a consequence of the continuing process of colonisation taking place in the region. As he sees the industrial region as adopting the role of ‘colonising power’ it is unfortunate that he offers it few suggestions for effecting social change. Furthermore, the introduction of the two kilometre law shows that the colonised are bent on doing their own colonising. This law, making it illegal for Aboriginals to drink in the Todd River and its environs, has had a disastrous effect on the town camps as people are now taking their liquor there. Beck’s research was probably conducted before this law was passed, but it does illustrate the problem of trying to apply the theory of internal colonisation to a town like Alice. While Beck’s study is consistently short on solutions he does draw attention to the need to study liquor outlets in Alice Springs. This has now been done, and the results do not augur well for the health of the Aboriginal children of the town camps. In terms of licensed alcohol outlets per 100,000 persons over 15 years of age, the Northern Territory has considerably more outlets than Queensland or Western Australia. Within the Northern Territory, Alice Springs has 39.58 per cent more outlets than the rest of the Northern Territory, i.e. nearly twice the outlet rate of Queensland and Western Australia.1

‘Why is Aboriginal health an enigma?’ Beck asks. He suggests (p.115) that the answer is partly provided by A.P. Elkin, who wrote:

Much of their sickness and below standard health has resulted from white contact and particularly from the change from nomadic to sedentary life and from naturally gathered foods to purchased foodstuffs.2

1 Smith 1985.
BOOK REVIEWS

While this uses history to explain why Aboriginal health is poor, it hardly explains the enigma of Aboriginal health. It is an enigma because a great deal of government money is expended on Aborigines yet the results could hardly be called satisfactory. Beck points out that Australia emphasises institutionalised medical care rather than programmes which directly involve the community. He notes that the town campers prefer to use the Aboriginal Medical Service, which is community based, rather than the European medical system. Unfortunately his book contains very little information about the Aboriginal Medical Service. Readers are merely told that many of the European doctors are aware of the persistence of traditional notions on health and disease in the town camp people and hence see the benefit of referral to tribal healers when appropriate.

Whatever its faults The enigma of Aboriginal health is an important book. Beck not only demonstrates the role that history has played in Aboriginal health, but he also shows that the health of a people depends on their social, cultural and economic environment. Those seeking to improve the health of Aborigines have far too often sought 'one-track' solutions which fail to appreciate the complexities of the situation. The enigma of Aboriginal health will help to rectify this.

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This is the last of a series of three handbooks of Australian Aboriginal languages edited by Dixon and Blake and written largely by scholars closely associated with the Linguistics Department of Monash University and that of the Faculty of Arts at the Australian National University.

Each of the volumes contains grammatical sketches of Australian languages, written to a standardised format, including sample texts and wordlists of varying lengths in nearly all cases. Volume 1 contains, apart from a discussion of recurrent features in Australian languages, grammatical sketches of Guugu Yimidhirr (John Haviland), Pitta-Pitta (Barry Blake), Gumbaynggir (Diana Eades) and Yaygir (Terry Crowley). Volume 2 features descriptions of Wargamay (R.M.W. Dixon), Anguthimiri (Terry Crowley), Watjarri (Wilf Douglas) and Margany and Gunya (Gavin Breen). This volume also includes an assessment of available materials on the long-extinct languages of Tasmania (Crowley and Dixon). Volume 3, the final volume of the series, deals with Djapu (Frances Morphy), Yukulta (Sandra Keen), Uradhi (Terry Crowley) and Nyawaygi (R.M.W. Dixon).

Apart from the obvious merits, from a comparative standpoint, of the standardised format, the greatest value of the series lies in the fact that all of the languages described (with the exception of Guugu Yimidhirr and Djapu) are either extinct or on the point of extinction.
During the past two centuries many Australian Aboriginal languages have disappeared without being recorded, and many more are threatened with extinction in the near future due to dwindling numbers of speakers. In this context the *Handbook of Australian languages*, in these three volumes, renders a considerable service both to individual Aboriginal communities and to Australian language specialists.

In Volume 3 Frances Morphy presents the first comprehensive account of a Yolngu dialect (Djapu) to be published. Morphy does, however, graciously acknowledge the considerable pioneering work carried out in another dialect (Gupapuyngu) by Beulah Lowe at Milingimbi. Djapu, spoken in north-eastern Arnhem Land, is a suffixing Pama-Nyungan language, cut off from the great Pama-Nyungan family of languages extending over much of the continent by the prefixing and multiple-classifying languages which hem it in to the west and south. Morphy’s account is extensive and thorough, occupying almost half of the volume. She is at odds with an increasing number of linguists, however, in that she considers Pama-Nyungan to be a typological rather than a genetic grouping. Keen’s description concerns Yukulta, a suffixing language spoken to the west of Burketown in north-western Queensland. The main interest in this language, apart from the language salvage aspect, is the alternation between the transitive and the antipassive construction. The information upon which the description is based was collected in 1969. This study of Yukulta was originally an M.A. thesis, considerably reworked since it was presented in 1972. Keen states that she has not kept abreast of the latest theoretical developments since that time. Her description is nevertheless a very readable and comprehensive account. Crowley describes the Uradhi dialects of Cape York as spoken at the Cowal Creek settlement near Bamaga in 1975. These dialects, and indeed a number of other Cape York languages, are notable for the series of fricative consonants which are part of their phonemic inventory. These fricatives, most unusual in Australian Aboriginal languages, are the result of a series of phonological changes operating on a ‘typically Australian’ proto-language. Crowley’s study covers a number of dialects of Uradhi, including Yadhaykenu, Angkamuthi and Atamapaya. The grammatical description is eclectic, covering all the dialects for which he could collect data. Perhaps the most valuable feature is his account of the development of the present-day phonologies from proto-Paman, reconstructed by Hale in the mid-1970s. Dixon describes Nyawaygi, spoken in the Halifax Bay area of north Queensland. His account compares and contrasts features of Nyawaygi with other languages previously described by Dixon in the same area, namely Yidiny, Dyirbal and Wargamay, so completing an areal study which began in the early 1960s.

The *Handbook of Australian languages*, Volume 3, is a very useful compendium, then, one which first and foremost serves the interests of Australianists with a bent for syntactic structures. The standardised format allows for ease of comparison across languages throughout the series of three volumes. On a more practical level, however, the series presents a permanent record of a large number of Australian Aboriginal languages which would otherwise have passed into extinction unknown to future generations.

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BOOK REVIEWS


This is a book about power. It doesn't protest gently, but it sounds gentle. It is about the imagery of power, visual imagery primarily, and the images are often, even mostly, beautiful if sad. Unlike Dutton's White on black (1974), which was properly noisy and which portrayed the cruder side of power relations, including open if unequal warfare, the Donaldsons' symposium is subtler, if no less devastating.

Seeing the First Australians does cohere, as the editors hoped it would. It is essentially about European perceptions of Aboriginal life on the east coast of Australia (pace the cover illustration!) between 1770 and the 1920s.

Bernard Smith advances his own and our knowledge of the first European depictions. In the process he sorts out some confusion about Melanesian and Aboriginal representations. He raises too what became an enduring problem of analysing posed studies. Glyndwr Williams follows with some rather pedantic improvements to Beaglehole's depiction of Cook's voyage, and some sharper observations on Hawksworth's influence.

The volume changes gear with James Urry's curious 'Savage sportsmen'; although he too writes of the early years of contact. He contends that the Englishman's love of the hunt caused him to appreciate the hunting abilities of inland Aborigines: 'Aborigines were sportsmen, involved in the chase after game; even if they were naked and had peculiar customs, no one could deny them this sense of dignity' (p.56). He also makes clever use of Clark's drawings (1813). But the 'savage sportsman' image did not last long, and found no place in Ward's Australian legend.

Mulvaney's 'The Darwinian perspective' is restricted to a few interpretative comments and serves merely to underline our need for a full history of social Darwinism in Australia. More substantial is Tamsin Donaldson's essay on European responses to Australian languages, especially the Wiradjuri and Ngiyampaa of New South Wales. It is clear that the Aborigines were shamed into not using their own languages among Europeans, and that by having to use a 'broken English' (the only one made available to them) they engendered a double disrespect among Europeans.

The papers by Maynard, Topliss, McBryde and Peterson may be grouped, although each makes fascinating reading. All are ultimately 'projections of melancholy'; all photographers and artists work within a social Darwinian scheme of things. Tom Roberts's interest in Aborigines is greater than most art historians have hitherto written. Isabel McBryde offers a lavishly illustrated vignette on Port Macquarie photographer Thomas Dick (d.1927); while Maynard, in a welcome if partial glance at South Australia, introduces us to Oscar Fristrom's extraordinary painting 'The Last of the South Australian Blacks' (1894). Peterson's short analysis of early twentieth-century postcards groans a little under the weight of its theoretical structure – perhaps this paper occasioned some debate at the 1981 Conference.

The book concludes with a virtuoso piece by Rhys Jones on ordering the landscape European-style and Aboriginal-style. The irony of Europeans having in Canberra created a 'wilderness' to Aboriginal eyes is deftly handled.

Taken together, the papers in Seeing the First Australians are refreshing in presentation and pleasant to read. The editors have served well the study of Aboriginal-European relations.

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197

The title of Bill Rosser’s book, Dreamtime nightmares, is apt. Nevertheless, as the reader is drawn into the biographical accounts of what it was like to grow up Aboriginal in an ever-increasingly European-dominated country, the very real nightmares of these people are interspersed with good humour and light-heartedness. The atrocities perpetrated on Aboriginal people by Europeans are recounted sometimes with anger, but mostly with irony. A matter-of-fact manner when telling these yarns belies the pain and humiliation that must have been experienced by each of the story-tellers.

Ruby de Satge, a ‘dynamic but diminutive black woman’ who held her own with drovers and musterers in the outback areas of Queensland, tells of her life on the move as she mustered with the men ‘chasing cattle and that’. As Rosser draws out only part of this interesting woman’s life, the reader is drawn in by the tales of bad treatment meted out to Aboriginals by Europeans: of hard work with no recompense, of starvation and cruelty. But we also learn something of survival tactics, through glimpses of life in the bush and the practical knowledge necessary to survive under harsh circumstances. We are taken on a ‘roo hunt in a Kombi with the indomitable Ruby, learn how to catch a dingo, and above all learn a little of one Aboriginal woman’s methods of survival in the face of adversity.

Jack Punch was born in the bush but left to go mustering when he was ten or eleven, spending a lot of time ‘ringing’ on Barkly Downs Station in west-central Queensland near the Northern Territory border. Punch’s yarn is about traditional customs: things he remembers others telling, and experiences he has had himself. Traditional practices such as circumcision, ‘whistle-cocking’ (subincision), mores of behaviour, and kadaitcha men who would ‘sing’ their victims to death, or point the bone, are described.

Then follows shorter talks the author has with Harry Spencer, Bruce Bismarck, Peggy James and Dorothy Webster. Following a similar line of questioning, the reader is made aware of commonalities in the experiences of most Aborigines brought up in Queensland in earlier times: separation from family, discriminatory education practices, unpaid labour and, later, misappropriation of wages by the people who were supposedly their ‘protectors’.

Rosser’s personal experiences on Palm Island produced his previous book, This is Palm Island, and his abhorrence of the island is carried through into Dreamtime nightmares. Fred and Iris Clay, who spent many years on the infamous Palm Island, recall their experiences both on and off the island. Fred Clay recalls some degrading punishments for ‘crimes’ such as stealing a loaf of bread, or (on women) sneaking out to ‘go bush with their boyfriends’:

I used to wonder how the women felt. When they used to get punishment, they used to get their head shaved and wore sack bags — just holes for the head and arms. That’s all they had and then they had to sweep the streets.

The boss would call everyone out and parade the boys if there was any misdemeanour and he couldn’t find the culprit responsible. He’d get us out and parade us at night. He’d make us walk in single file and as we passed, he would hand us a rock and tell us to put it on our head and keep walking around . . . we were parading from 8 o’clock to 10 o’clock at night.

Many European Australians are blissfully ignorant of the apartheid that was in practice on Palm Island:

Take for instance, the picture theatre. The balcony was only for whites. No blacks could sit up there. At the kiosk there was a separate little serving window,
only for whites. Even while working in the kiosk, serving a black person, and a white person came along, the assistant would have to leave the black person and go and serve the white person.

In the final yarn, Rosser and Iris Clay discuss the pros and cons of 'the Act' and whether or not alcohol should be allowed on Reserves.

Although allowing us only glimpses of several lives (the shorter stories left one with the feeling that it would have been better to know more about one person than a little about several people), Rosser's book is very readable, and convinces the reader of the injustices doled out to Aborigines by Europeans in the past. The book ends on the encouraging note that 'things have changed'. It is certainly to be hoped.

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From reminiscences of Daisy Bates by Aborigines of Yalata Aboriginal Reserve, South Australia, in the 1960s and 1970s to a systematic reading of the Daisy Bates manuscripts in the National Library commencing 1977; culminating in a sensitively edited and handsome volume published by the National Library of Australia in 1985; Isobel White has completed a mammoth task, and deserves to be roundly congratulated. She has made available a body of work which, in manuscript form, is daunting in volume, frustrating in organisation, tedious in repetition, and frequently aggravating in style, but extremely valuable for the unique record it provides of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Western Australian Aboriginal life. Now in book form, with an introductory essay on Daisy Bates and helpful forewords to each chapter, editor White has done the seemingly impossible by producing a readable text from an unwieldy manuscript.

Daisy Bates's work was carried out between 1904 and 1912, in the social climate which produced a Western Australia state Act called the Aborigines Act, 1905. This was a singularly repressive piece of legislation which denied Aborigines virtually any civil rights and was ambiguous and all-embracing in scope, catching many in its net who had not been affected by previous legislation relating to Aborigines. Under this Act, the Aborigines Department was established to administer Aboriginal affairs, and became the main bureaucratic instrumentality to interact with Aborigines. Under the powers of the Aborigines Act, countless Aborigines were involuntarily removed to and confined on reserves, especially the Moore River Native Settlement. The Act also had profoundly destructive economic implications for Aborigines throughout the state, especially for the group in the south-west attempting to establish themselves on small farming properties and in the workforce.

White gives a sympathetic portrayal of Daisy Bates in her introductory essay, making a point that for her times she was well educated, independent of mind and spirit, resolute and resilient. If anything, White is too fair. Daisy Bates did whitewash the treatment of Aborigines on stations in Western Australia, did write condescendingly and sensationally on Aborigines for various newspapers, and was self-righteously content to 'smooth the dying pillow'
rather than press for better conditions or rights for Aborigines. Daisy Bates also had to support herself financially, which doubtless led to some compromises on her part, given the times in which she worked. Nevertheless, through her own book *The passing of the Aborigines*,\(^1\) as well as through Elizabeth Salter’s work\(^2\) and that of Ernestine Hill,\(^3\) and from other sources, her condescending attitudes are all too apparent. Hence it is particularly important that she be placed squarely in the historical period in which she lived, to avoid a judgement of her character based on today’s values that belittles her very real contribution to the record of Aboriginal life in Western Australia.

Doubtless, a combination of the times and her own personality explains Daisy Bates’s two unsatisfactory marriages; her prolonged and frustrating struggles with the male bureaucracy of the Aborigines Department in her attempts to have her manuscript published, her disillusionment with Labor Party politicians when her manuscript was finally returned to her, to be published at her own expense (there had been a change of government in the state); and her rigidity of mind in her advanced years. It certainly took an unusual character in those days to associate intimately with Aborigines in the way that Daisy Bates did, either to study or to help them. Some of her apparent shortcomings in this regard, such as always wearing gloves when she was with Aborigines, can most certainly be forgiven her.

As White points out (p.16), Daisy Bates’s attitudes must be judged in the context of her times, and so must her methodology. With seventy years of hindsight it is easy to criticise her as lacking the training and education to handle her material properly (p.21). White (pp.18-19) correctly places her among the pioneers of fieldwork in Australia, living among her Aboriginal informants, listening to them, and recording her observations and their accounts and explanations. At that time anthropological field work was in its early stages in Australia, and other contemporary writers such as E.M. Curr relied heavily on second-hand, impressionistic and patchy material supplied by other European correspondents.

Daisy Bates lacked a system of recording, and refused to accept criticism of her methods from both Andrew Lang and, especially, Radcliffe-Brown. On reading Radcliffe-Brown’s terse comments on her manuscripts it is not surprising that she found him abrasive. He was certainly intolerant of and unsympathetic towards her. Daisy Bates was also extremely accepting of information given to her by her Aboriginal informants, defending any contradictions in her field notes by insisting that this is what she had been told. Had she not had this quirk of personality, many apparent inconsistencies in her work might have been resolved, the end product being fuller and more satisfying. White carefully avoids criticising her on this score, preferring to stress the contribution she did make to an understanding of Aboriginal kinship, and the general picture of everyday behaviour in Aboriginal communities which emerges from her material. Daisy Bates’s inconsistencies, for example between her description of the lowly position of women in the communities in which she worked, while her field notes indicate their ritual and leadership participation, are excused by the cultural blinkers she wore as a legacy of the times in which she lived. White is right in this. The strengths and limitations of her work can be appreciated better with an understanding of Daisy Bates the person. However, there is no point in making a character assassination of her which inevitably extends to her material and undervalues it. Radcliffe-Brown was careful

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1 1938/1966.
2 1971.
3 1971.
to avoid denying that her work held worth, although he lamented its inaccessibility because of her lack of systematisation in her recording methods, and he gave up on her as a person very early in the piece. Had he been someone she could have learnt from, things might have been different.

The original Daisy Bates manuscripts are very general and descriptive, and the book cannot avoid this. However, by eliminating much of the repetition, White makes it possible to get to the core of the information collected by Bates. This is extensive, both in geographical spread and in scope of interest. Bates’s field work took her throughout the entire state of Western Australia, from Albany and Esperance in the south to Derby and Turkey Creek in the north, taking in the Pilbara and extending east to the eastern Goldfields. The result is an invaluable body of work which is now more widely available.

The value of Daisy Bates’s manuscript is twofold: it is a descriptive record, and it is raw material for analysis. Especially for the south-west, Bates utilised a small number of aged informants, many of whom were living on the Welshpool Reserve near Perth. With her tent pitched next to theirs, she was able to record information on mortuary, totemic and marriage practices and beliefs, as these were lived at the time as well as how they were remembered from the nineteenth century. This is then a source of descriptive information on south-western Aboriginal society which does not exist elsewhere, such as in G.F. Moore’s account,4 that of Sir George Grey,5 or in the Colonial Secretary’s Office Records, on which she drew. This material can then be analysed by placing it in a broader Australian context, by drawing on the work of later field researchers to provide a framework in which to view the particularities which Daisy Bates records.

A special mention needs to be made of the visual appeal of this volume. Judy Hungerford has designed a beautiful book with an extremely appealing dust jacket which is illustrative of both Bates’s and White’s respective tasks. The dust jacket features a photograph of Daisy Bates with an old, south-western Aboriginal informant wearing a fur cloak. This is a concise summary of Daisy Bates’s main contribution to knowledge of south-western Aboriginal life, in particular. This image is superimposed on a page of Daisy Bates’s handwritten manuscript. This forms a second statement of the editorial task involved in making her work available to the public, which fell to White.

As White acknowledges, the responsibilities of editing are not light, and what one editor will cut, another will include. I miss a single quote from NLA MS 365/72/190, Notebook 13; Marriage Laws etc. at Guildford, p.23, which gave me a glimpse of a different Bates from the impression I had formed of an irritating and egocentric person: ‘It takes some time for the beauty of the open places to reach one’s soul, but once there hills, sea, river, wood, all are as nothing beside the beauty of the flat land that goes on and on in infinite open space to the glorious sunset and sunrise’. But then, I never would have had the fortitude to attempt Isobel White’s undertaking.

4 1884.
5 1841.
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To say that Noel Loos's book, *Invasion and resistance*, is a traditional Australian social history would be misleading. The theoretical school of historians who use this 'descriptive' mode of interpretation come from the German historical establishment through Karl Lamprecht, through to the American social historian, Frederick Jackson Turner,1 and then through Australian historians like Charles Rowley and Russell Ward.2 The 'frontier thesis' has been the subject of a great deal of controversy in the past, but I will not pursue the matter here except to say that it is long on words and short on theory. Nevertheless, *Invasion and resistance* is a social history with a number of redeeming features.

The redeeming aspects which should be mentioned are: first, the style is easy to read and the chronological pattern of dealing with each of the facets of the frontiers is easy to follow; second, the research is comprehensive and original, but it is difficult to locate any oral history input; third, the appendixes, together with the annotated bibliography, are detailed, fourth, the subject matter of this social history is well supported by scientific data such as geographical, climatic, anthropological, political, sociological, economic and prehistoric data; finally, the author looks at the future relationships not only between the indigenous Aboriginal clans but also between Aborigines and non-Aborigines as being one of peace and harmony; as I will show, this is not a reflection of either the period from 1897 or of the contemporary historical situation. The author has produced a work which supports the revolutionary proposition that the expropriation of land was achieved through conquest and not settlement, the opposite of what many of the bourgeois historians would have us all believe.3

Like most historical writings about the 'colonial frontier', Noel Loos has to contend with either shrinking frontiers or ones that need to be ideally constructed once they have exhausted themselves, as he explains in his preface. Most importantly, Loos's frontier is traversed a number of times by the author himself. For example, he claims that he will ‘redress the

1 Burke 1980:24.
3 Hookey 1984.
balance through collecting oral histories from North Queensland Aborigines ... and it is possible for the author to have a ... perspective of the colonised'. Two providers of oral history are acknowledged in the preface but it is difficult to identify, either in the theoretical or descriptive aspects of the book, where oral history is in any way influential. The most disappointing feature of this work is the opportunity lost by not attempting a detailed assessment to determine what historical stage this regional indigenous society had reached by the time of first European contact. By using only the descriptive model used by Elkin, Berndt, Rowley, and Ward, it was not possible to construct a model upon which a discussion of the mode of production could have been analysed. Further to this, the relations of production and productive forces, as related to the internal workings of the pre-contact relationships, was an important omission, i.e. the transformation as a result of the advent of first the 'petty commodity' frontiers' men and women, and then of the 'capitalist mode of production' by way of the state machinery.

Further to this, Loos makes no attempt to relate the internal or external conflict produced by the expropriation of land by the oppressive and dominating capitalist mode of production. As a result there is no discussion of the link between the forces of production (technical knowhow, the products which sustain society) and the relations of production (the social relationships found in production), i.e. the nature of the economic roles permitted by the state of development of the forces of production and, further, relationships that exist between these roles. If the changes in these relationships were identified, it might have been possible to analyse the changes which stemmed from the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure, in both the regional indigenous group and the state.

There is also the problem of specifying some explanatory relationship between the loyalties and the ideologies of the native police, in relation to their own clan groups and between clan groups, since they helped the state police forces to subjugate the local population up to 1897. Similarly, there are analytical questions posed by the book in relation to the petty commodity traders who posed the immediate threat. For example, in the regional indigenous civil society, what was the conflict within the substructure (or the economic base) and the superstructure (or laws, family kinship systems and religion) which caused the collapse both from within and from without that society? In addition, how quickly and at what period of time was the indigenous mode of production completely or even partially subsumed by the capitalist mode of production?

The main problem with the frontier thesis is that it cannot deal with the diversity of the nature of the capitalist state. Noel Loos has written an interesting and comprehensive social history of the north Queensland area under 'colonial expropriation' as a revolutionary view of how the colony was formed. To imply, however, that conquest rather than settlement was the strategy is not sufficient, because it leaves out the theory. An important omission is any theoretical discussion, not only of the authority structure and its breakdown but also of the reasons it became so easy for a change of loyalties to the capitalist system well before the imperialist state had completed its subjugation of the total environment of the indigenous population. There is an increasing appreciation that the capitalist system overtook

4 Hartwig 1978.
5 Jennett 1978.
so-called traditional society long before the turn of the century. The opportunity lost by the author throws no light on this or modern dilemmas.

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After Walbiri (Warlpiri) men had killed a dogger, Fred Brooks, and failed in an attempt to kill a station owner, William Morton, an unknown number of Walbiri men, women and children were massacred in punitive expeditions led by Mounted Constable George Murray. The Walbiri men acted to avenge the sexual involvement of the two victims with Walbiri women and, in the case of Morton, his persistent cruelty to his stockmen and their families. But the understandable attempts at revenge by the Aborigines brought death to so many of their people that an area of Walbiri territory along the Lander River was deserted for many years by the terrified survivors.

Murray arrested two Walbiri men and took them to Darwin, but no evidence was brought against them at their trial and they were released. During his evidence Murray admitted to killing seventeen Aborigines — in self-defence as he claimed — though the actual number was undoubtedly many more. These disclosures so angered public opinion that Prime Minister Bruce was compelled to institute an inquiry. But such was the biased composition of the Board of Enquiry (a Queensland police magistrate, a South Australian police inspector and the Chief Government Resident and Police Commissioner for Central Australia) that the one-sided evidence called enabled it to find that the shooting of Aborigines was justified, that there had been no provocation of Aborigines and that there was no evidence of starvation of Aborigines in Central Australia.

There the matter rested for over fifty years, except in the memories of those Walbiri who had been lucky to escape in 'the killing times'. The story was revived and retold in 1982 when the Northern Territory Lands Commissioner, Mr Justice Toohey, heard evidence for a Walbiri land claim. Old men and women recalled how they had lived on land now part of their claim until the time of the Coniston massacres, when they fled in terror from the wholesale killing. In order to write this book, John Cribbin gathered all available evidence, including that presented to Mr Justice Toohey as well as the records of the 1928 Darwin trial.
and the 1929 Board of Enquiry. It reveals a sad chapter in the record of Aboriginal-European relations in Central Australia, but it makes compelling reading.

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Childhood on the Erambie Mission, West Cowra, has given some who grew up there a notable eloquence of word and deed in later life. Aspects of that experience have become known to theatre-goers both in Australia and overseas through the success of Bob Meritt's play The cake man. The work of 'Mum ShirP, especially on behalf of children, has spoken for itself to an Australia-wide audience. This book is prefaced by a remark of Shirley Smith's to another, much younger, person who 'camped at Erambie, same as me': Kevin Gilbert. She 'changed his nappies, years and years ago'. Unlike her, he learned to read and write, and recorded her views amongst the many others he assembled in Living black. 'What is an Aboriginal?' he asked her. 'An Aboriginal is anyone that lived down there with me, that knew what it was like'.

The people who are given a voice in Down there with me have the same personal directness, the same flair for the rhythms and power of the spoken word as each of this sample of three publicly vociferous people does, whether they speak or write. Their special persuasive gifts are shown here to be firmly rooted in a linguistic inheritance shared with others 'who knew what it was like'. But this book’s particular eloquence lies in the way in which these others, as recorded here, refrain from persuasion. They are engaging, not with the wider world, which has much to learn from what they say, but with Peter Read, an outsider but a friend. His questions, as he is careful to make plain, 'direct the subjects to be discussed' (p.xv). They may focus people's responses, but they do not shape their expression. The achievement of this book is to draw together the sort of comment, anecdote and reminiscence that people make use of in the joint construction of their private daily lives with one another, and make it readable and more generally illuminating.

Shirley Smith was referring to a past now forty years ago, a past with its pleasures drawn on and its pains in some ways, for her, transcended. Not everyone who knew Erambie then has left, or wanted to. Others have been unable to come and go as they pleased. Many have been 'sent away' to institutions elsewhere. Some have returned, others have not. There are older people who knew Erambie much earlier. And well over a hundred people are still living 'down there' today. Peter Read has sought out people from Cowra Mission with experiences of many kinds. Some have been more scarred than strengthened by them. Being allowed to eavesdrop in a considerately structured way on their conversations with him, readers can begin to appreciate how and why. This oral history of a single New South Wales Aborigines' Protection Board Aboriginal Reserve reveals some of the significance, both positive and negative, that those thirty-two acres have had for hundreds of Wiradjuri since

1891, though not so much of the radicalising effect which, Read argues, it also had. (Nearly all of the publicly influential Erambie people who demonstrate this have not participated.) Along the way it shows us a small and often grievously restricted world, but vividly and in the round. This microcosmic picture does indeed provide one kind of representative answer for askers of that seemingly unquenchable question: ‘Who is an Aborigine?’ And I imagine that the book, with its impassioned and informative historical introduction, will provoke fresh responses too from those who have never needed to ask, especially people who have been, or are now, down there on Cowra Mission.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


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**BOOK NOTES**

(Inclusion here does not preclude review in future issues)


This is the second in an important series of oral histories compiled by Bruce Shaw from taped memories of old identities of the East Kimberley. The previous volume *My country of the pelican dreaming* was reviewed by Bill Gammage in Volume 7 of *Aboriginal History*. That told the story of a full-descent Aboriginal man, whereas this second volume tells of a man with a European father. As a young man Jack Sullivan ‘came over to the white side’ and held responsible positions on several large cattle stations until his retirement in 1971 at the age of seventy. This book is a valuable contribution to the history of Aborigines in Western Australia, and incidentally also to that of the cattle stations of the East Kimberley.


The Wentworth Lecture for 1984, given by one of Australia’s leading anthropologists. A comprehensive survey and discussion of writing to date on Aboriginal political life, with the suggestion that this displayed simultaneously egalitarianism in some aspects and authoritarianism in others.
BOOK REVIEWS


The autobiography of an Aboriginal woman whose father was European. She was born in northwest Queensland, taken as an infant to Palm Island, and sent to the mainland to work on stations as soon as she was old enough. After that her life was one of hard work for little pay, but she tells it in a surprisingly cheerful manner.

*The Manga-Manda Settlement, Phillip Creek: an historical reconstruction from written, oral and material evidence. By Patricia Davison. Material Culture Unit, James Cook University, North Queensland, 1986. Pp.ix + 80, black and white illustrations. $8.50 (soft) post free from the University Bookshop.

An innovatory study of the material culture of a Central Australian settlement, occupied by Warlpiri and Warumungu speakers and European staff from 1945 to 1956. The author used surface collecting and excavation as well as oral and historical records to describe houses, tools and utensils.


Useful for the general reader and the student as an outline of Aboriginal religious belief and practice. All extracts are from writings this century, mostly quite recent, some rather complex for the general reader. New analysis is provided by the editors’ introductions to the separate parts.


The film, made by Ian Dunlop in 1976 and released in 1979, gives important insight into the traditional burial practices in north-east Arnhem Land, a remote corner of the continent. This book explains the succession of the rituals and the belief behind each sequence, giving the film even greater meaning for students of Aboriginal traditions.