I am not an anthropologist, so cannot contribute anything to the subject in which Diane Barwick was so distinguished and humane a worker. But her voice, in its humanity, its dedication to reason and justice, speaks across 140 years to an early observer of the relations between Aborigines and white invaders: Alexander Harris. If due attention had been paid to what he had to say in his book *Settlers and convicts* (1847) many of the tragic mistakes which have bedevilled black-white relationships might have been avoided. It is their absolute honesty and freedom from cant which bring Alexander Harris and Diane Barwick so close together across a century; reminding ourselves of their closeness helps to sustain a faith that justice and reason will not fail.

In the first place, Alexander Harris recognised that his countrymen had invaded Australia: he did not embrace the doctrine of *terra nullius*. At the same time he was a realist. It was no longer possible when he wrote for the white invaders to get up and go home. In any case, part of the problem was that ‘home’ had thrown out the majority of the white men, convicts and poor settlers, who were hence under the necessity of trying to survive elsewhere.

‘It is quite clear to me,’ he wrote, ‘that it is rather the mode in which we seize and hold the soil that does the mischief than the act itself.’ After elaborating his argument about the plight of convicts and poor whites, he concedes that Aborigines regard the whites as a nation of robbers, robbing out of mere wantonness, and not from the pressure of necessity. They understand no theories about capital and labour, and pauperism and emigration: all they feel is that they are wronged; all they see, the fact that it is done by those who are rich already, and do not want the soil for subsistence; not by the poor, who might be justified.

‘If . . . there is anything is anything to be done for the civilisation of the blacks,’ he concluded ‘and to prevent their utter extermination, it will be found in the encouragement of the amicable relations which so easily establish themselves between them and the small settler.’

In essence this was a class solution, arising out of Harris’s definition of what constituted an Australian, made very clear in his novel *The emigrant family* (1849). For him an Australian ‘native’ was anyone born in the country, whether he was white, Aboriginal, or negro like the ‘hero’ of his novel. The dispossessed were to be encouraged to make common cause:

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1 Harris 1847:417.
2 Harris 1847:421.
3 Harris 1847:420.
'Missionary efforts, I am afraid, will long, if not always, be the "voice and no more".'\(^4\) In a striking passage of sympathetic imagination, Harris, himself a genuine if unorthodox Christian, looks at colonial Christianity with the eyes of a black man:

'You!' he [the Aborigine] says, 'you who tie one another up, and flog one another within an inch of life, for some little hasty word; you who begrudge one another enough to eat; you who deprive me of my hunting grounds, only to increase possessions for mere possessions' sake; you, a people divided into two classes, the one hateful and the other contemptible, the tyrant and the slave; you who keep, and clothe, and train men to human slaughter as a trade — you teach me to be better! — Me who walk the forest free, who appropriate no more than I need, who never fight but as a deeply injured man, who would not lay your bloody lash upon my dog, much less my brother; who "in wrath remember mercy", and give even the public culprit, against whom I am to direct my spear at the command of the tribe, his shield to defend himself with, — YOU CONVERT ME! preposterous!'\(^5\)

The comment that Harris appends to his speech might have been Diane Barwick's: ‘Oh! that mankind would have but common sense.’\(^6\)

Justice, reason, unsentimental *caritas*, experience, all join these two rare spirits. How well they would have understood one another!

\(^4\) Harris 1847:421.
\(^5\) Harris 1849:342.
\(^6\) ibid.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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