

DEALING WITH THE LEGACY OF THE PAST: ABORIGINES AND ATOMIC TESTING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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In this paper I outline some of the events that have affected a group of Aboriginal people who now live in the far west of South Australia. The history of their contact with non-Aboriginal people has been one of alienation and dispossession as well as a requirement to respond to the variety of differing (and sometimes contradictory) government and mission policies. The complexity of the policies, the diversity of the issues and the variety of agencies involved have affected the Aborigines in significant ways. Although Aborigines have been generally powerless to alter or influence these policies, they have been active participants in the processes that have so immediately affected their lives. Decisions made by Aborigines today in a new era of choice are also made in the context of the past, so that the physical consequences of actions taken sometimes many decades ago bear upon those choices and confound them. What I describe here are the circumstances that surround these events in order to demonstrate why it is that contemporary choice is constrained by dilemmas that have their origins in the past.

The setting

The southern Pitjantjatjara belong to the western desert cultural bloc and formerly inhabited regions of the central and southern Great Victoria Desert. They now represent a fairly homogeneous linguistic group, though formerly they were distinguished by named dialect units and by physical occupation of defined ranges of territory. The Pitjantjatjara first encountered European Australians about the turn of the century and subsequently migrated from the desert to government settlements, ration depots and missions of the desert fringes. One such location became a siding on the Trans-Australian railway line at a soak called Ooldea where the philanthropic Daisy Bates also lived, dispensing rations and medicine to a population of between 300 and 400 Aborigines from 1919 to 1935. The United Aborigines Mission (UAM) subsequently established a mission at Ooldea Soak in 1933. The Aborigines continued to visit their desert homelands from Ooldea, though these visits became less frequent as the years passed. The UAM, unlike Daisy Bates, had a vested interest in distributing rations in order to maintain a client population of Aborigines. The children of the desert people were raised in the mission dormitories, with the tacit consent of their parents, and taught to eschew their language and culture.¹ The U.A.M. policy, which was hostile to any accommodation with traditional culture, affected traditional life, ritual and to a lesser extent language retention, particularly among the

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¹ Berndt and Berndt 1951:134; Brady 1987:41.

children who were accommodated in the dormitories.² However, like the Lutherans who followed them, the UAM missionaries were ultimately unable to break down traditional culture. Moreover, the mission was unable to sustain its position at Ooldea both because of practical difficulties experienced at the site and because of internal political squabbles within the organisation itself.

In 1952 the UAM withdrew from Ooldea and the Aborigines were abandoned to travel west by train to Cundeelee, north to Ernabella or to be taken up by the Lutherans who were eager to gain a toe-hold in this remote area of SA.³ Some Aborigines did travel west, but those who went north were persuaded to return to Ooldea by the Native Patrol Officer MacDougall, who claimed that he was concerned that they might perish of thirst in the remote station country beyond Bulgunnia where he found them. Whatever his real motives, arrangements were made to have the people picked up by truck from Ooldea on their return there by train.⁴ They were then taken to join their relations who were camped close to the present site of Yalata some 140 km south of Ooldea, under the supervision of Lutheran missionaries from Koonibba mission west of Ceduna.

At the same time and coincidentally the Australian government alienated a large portion of the southern Pitjantjatjara lands for British atomic bomb testing. This land was used for tests and trials until 1963 and the range was finally closed in 1968, but remained a prohibited area because of the contamination resulting from the tests and because some high-level radioactive waste was buried there.

The development of the atomic test site at Maralinga⁵

In the years after World War Two, both Britain and Australia expressed the view that the development of a nuclear deterrent that was independent of the USA was essential to maintain peace as well as being a means of thwarting the imperialist aspirations of Soviet Russia. A British A-bomb could be used as a counterbalance to the USA whose global hegemony in the post-war years was a matter for concern in Whitehall. In these precarious balancing games, Australia under Menzies became a willing pawn. Implicit in the development of a British nuclear deterrent was both Britain's desire to demonstrate its status as a world power and its ability to test the bomb at a suitable site. When discussions on British testing in the USA broke down in 1950, Prime Minister Attlee accepted a suggestion that Australia could provide a suitable test site.⁶ The Minister for Supply, Mr Howard Beale, said in 1955:

England has the know how; we have the open spaces, much technical skill and a great willingness to help the Motherland. Between us we should help

² For example, see Turner 1950:63-95.

³ For a detailed account of these events, see Brady 1987.

⁴ There is no evidence that Macdougall had any knowledge of the plans to develop an atomic testing site in the region at this time although it is possible. However, he had been urged to discourage Aborigines from settling in the vicinity of the Woomera Rocket Range Reserve and it seems likely that it was his desire to keep Aborigines away from this general area that inspired his actions rather than any real fear that they might die of thirst.

⁵ A detailed account of the tests and the political background to them is found in Milliken 1986

⁶ 'Australian Collation' (Aust. Col.) Submission RC800 to the Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia: 550701.

ABORIGINES AND ATOMIC TESTING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

to build the defences of the free world, and make historic advances in harnessing the forces of nature.⁷

The 'open spaces' were to be the Australian off-shore islands in the Indian Ocean called Monte Bello and later the mainland test sites at Emu and Maralinga in the Great Victoria Desert.

At the time it was understood that Aborigines had lived in these mainland areas and that it was possible (though perhaps unlikely) that some Aborigines might still be living there. Indeed the Patrol Officer attached to Woomera (the rocket testing facility some 500 km east-south-east of the A-bomb test sites) was required to determine the numbers of Aborigines in the desert regions which later became the test sites. One man was scarcely able to give an accurate account of the Aboriginal population over 100,000 square kilometres. Even with the appointment in 1956 of an additional Patrol Officer,⁸ it was evident to the Patrol Officers themselves, as well as the Royal Commission (set up in 1984 to inquire into the conduct of the tests) that there were Aborigines living in the prohibited area during testing.⁹ It was also clear that at least one family of Aborigines traversed and camped in the test area incurring considerable contamination,¹⁰ and that others suffered hardship and perhaps death as a result of being told to evacuate their lands.¹¹ Others may have experienced sickness and perhaps blindness as a result of contact with contaminated clouds following one of the tests.¹²

While efforts at controlling Aboriginal movements were well intentioned from a health and safety perspective, the development of the British nuclear deterrent and Australia's role in it had two fundamental consequences for Aborigines. They were cut off from their lands, being unable to revisit their country as they had done when they lived at Ooldea. Equally significant was their awareness that their land and its sacred sites and water-holes were being devastated by enormous explosions; the emotional and psychological stress that this certainly engendered has never been, and can probably never be, properly evaluated. One elderly man stated :

At Yalata we were still thinking about country, but they put a block on you, like a paddock, shut. There were soldiers at Watson [the railway station]...*Piling* [rockhole] no good *kapi* [water] no good. Wiluna rockhole we can't trust him, we can't trust him water near Maralinga.¹³

Another woman stated:

When we were sitting at Tallawan [Yalata] we didn't want to come to our countries. MacDougall said you have to sit down, *ngura wanti* [leave your country altogether] smoke *panya* [be mindful of]. MacDougall told us you not to go back because danger[ous]...the old men were feeling no good. He was crying for his country. The bomb finished it.¹⁴

7 McClelland *et al.* 1985:9-10.

8 *Ibid.*:311.

9 *Ibid.*:309-24, 379-80.

10 *Ibid.*:319-23.

11 *Ibid.*:380.

12 *Ibid.*:174-94.

13 Interview 18.1.85. Data in this paper are based on fieldwork conducted with Maggie Brady between 1981 and 1989 at Yalata and Oak Valley.

14 Interview 16.January 1985.

MacDougall, one of the Patrol Officers, saw the development of the test site as a matter of 'world security'¹⁵ and the safety of the Aborigines as something that could be accomplished by reconnaissance, census and vigilance. A.P. Elkin, the Australian anthropologist, and at the time one of the few experts on Aborigines, was pragmatic and cynical rather than radical when recruited to the government's Guided Projectiles Committee. Elkin said, 'As the project has been decided by the Empire leaders, our task is to see that the Aborigines' well-being is not interfered with in any way - not to waste energy in futile protest or abstract arguments'.¹⁶

The assumption underlying Elkin's statement was that Aborigines, secure on their mission stations, must be kept safe and their 'well-being' assured. Aborigines were, he believed, in a transitional stage which would eventually result in their developing into citizens and becoming fully assimilated or integrated¹⁷ Australians. Elkin wrote in 1958, 'The aim of all these schools, Mission and Government, is to prepare the children for their contact and association with the new order which has overtaken them'.¹⁸

The potential effects of the bomb tests on the sacred sites and on the socio-religious life of Aborigines was ignored because it was considered irrelevant. According to Elkin, in time Aborigines would leave their traditional ways and lifestyle behind, and all of its associations, and would develop into 'modern' men and women with singular and identifiable characteristics.

However, despite the assertion by the Lutheran missionaries at Yalata as late as the 1970s that 'the influence of...rites is gradually diminishing as the effects of education and Christian conviction supply satisfying answers to many things previously classed as mystical',¹⁹ ritual life did remain strong. Despite being cut off from their homelands, prohibited from revisiting sites of ritual and spiritual importance, and despite the energetic intervention of Christian missionaries, beliefs in and knowledge about the land remained a central focus of the Aboriginal way of life on the mission.²⁰ The southern Pitjantjatjara continued to hold their country through ritual practices and the telling of myths. They travelled to ritual gatherings held in communities to both the north and west and received visits from the members of these communities, who in turn practised and kept alive the ritual life. While living at Yalata they resisted incorporation into the wider Australian population by retaining an essentially Aboriginal lifestyle composed of mobile kin-based hearth groups. Government policies, however, allowed for the alienation and destruction of land, the importance of which to Aborigines was considered to be overridden by the

15 McClelland *et al.* 1985:159.

16 Elkin 1947.

17 Elkin did not see these two 'stages' of incorporation into non-Aboriginal Australian society as mutually exclusive. According to Elkin the aim of assimilation was to help Aborigines 'become an integral part of our Australian way of life' (1958:9). Elkin did not use assimilation to mean that Aborigines would become indistinguishable from non-Aboriginal Australians. It was a process whereby Aborigines would become fit to be citizens in terms of economic, political, religious, recreational and social criteria (*ibid.*). The distinction between assimilation and integration as expressed in the implementation of government policy is more clearly made by Berndt and Berndt (1988:524).

18 Elkin 1958:20. The attitude of the time is best summed up by the title of the cover illustration of Elkin's 1958 pamphlet on citizenship, 'In the old world: Artist. In the new world: Stockman' (Elkin 1958).

19 Yalata Mission n.d.:2.

20 Cf. Brady 1987.

exigencies of international politics. The problem for the Pitjantjatjara in the 1950s was that government policy, much influenced by men like Elkin, assumed that the Aboriginal relationship to remote desert tracts was no longer important, because other interests and priorities had taken its place. In fact they were wrong in their assumptions. The Aborigines suffered the consequences, persevering in a land-oriented culture and belief, while the object of that belief was out of reach and its physical integrity brought into question.

New policies: self-determination and self-management

While the last major bomb test at Maralinga took place in 1957, minor site trials, continued until 1963 during which large quantities of highly radioactive contamination (principally plutonium-239) were scattered over the range continued until 1963. The range was finally closed in September 1968. Meanwhile government policy towards Aborigines was changing. There was a shift from assimilation to self-determination.²¹ Aborigines were no longer seen as unimportant or merely as material to be moulded into a form useful and acceptable to the broader Australian community. Rather they would, as a result of Government policy, acquire equality with European Australians by participating in decisions that affected their own lives.²² The new policies stressed the importance of Aborigines in their own right and recognised that land was an important spiritual and (to a lesser extent) economic base.²³ Development for Aboriginal people could be achieved, so it was argued, if Aborigines owned the land they lived upon and had a say in the governance of their communities and the administration of their affairs.

In practice this meant a number of things.²⁴ For the southern Pitjantjatjara (some years behind their northern kin who received freehold title to their lands in 1981) it meant the awarding of land rights to part of their traditional lands as a result of the *Maralinga Tjarutja Land Rights Act (1984)*, legislation of the South Australian parliament.²⁵ The passing of the legislation, modelled on the South Australian *Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act (1981)* paved the way for reoccupation of the lands, an act which the southern Pitjantjatjara had anticipated by moving from Yalata to Ooldea and later to sites south of Maralinga in 1982.²⁶ Subsequently in 1985 they established an outstation some 160 kms north west of Maralinga and called the site Oak Valley.

The granting of land rights, the subsequent reoccupation of homelands and the policy of governments which helped to make all this possible significantly altered the *status quo* for the southern Pitjantjatjara. Formerly they had been barred from their lands which had been blasted and contaminated by atomic tests, and had little choice but to live at a mission upon which they had become increasingly dependent. Latterly, they had reoccupied their lands, had been consulted by government officials, parliamentarians, a State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and been told that not only did their opinion and aspirations count for something, but the governments, both State and Federal, wanted to hear it and act upon it.

²¹ For details of the shift see, for example, Hamilton 1987, Palmer 1987, Sanders 1982.

²² For a descriptive account of what politicians mean by the policies of self-management see, for example, Viner 1978:3443 and Hand 1987:2.

²³ Altman 1987:37 notes that foods derived from the bush per annum accounted for 46% of the total kilocalorie intake and 81% of the total protein intake (figures expressed as a mean of totals). The economic implications of this are also discussed by Altman.

²⁴ Sanders 1982:5.

²⁵ See Toyne and Vachon 1984 for a history of the Pitjantjatjara struggle for land rights.

²⁶ Palmer 1990.

The return to the desert was not without its problems. Parts of the eastern portion of the land the Aborigines chose to repossess and to live upon was now contaminated. Moreover, the processes to be employed to determine the extent of the contamination and, most important of all, who might pay to clean it up, caught the southern Pitjantjatjara in a complex web of interactions that brought with them their own particular problems.

Living with the legacy of Maralinga

In 1984 the Hawke Labor Government initiated a Royal Commission to investigate the British nuclear tests in Australia. The terms of reference set out an inquiry into whether the tests were safe, properly conducted and the Commissioners were to have 'particular regard' to the number of people affected by the tests including 'Aboriginals and other civilians'.²⁷ The Commissioners, one of whom was Aboriginal, took evidence from many Aboriginal groups and received substantial submissions prepared on their behalf. Many Aboriginal issues were addressed in the final report and five of the seven recommendations mentioned Aborigines. The Commission also uncovered many documents detailing the contamination and damage to Aboriginal land or land within the existing prohibited area at Maralinga.

The Aboriginal component in the Royal Commission was important because it was meant to symbolise Australia's concern for her indigenous people. To some extent the Aboriginal agenda overshadowed other aspects of the inquiry. It allowed the government to indicate through the vehicle of the Commission that the act of testing bombs in Australia was a British decision, supported by those with Anglophile tendencies with general (but predictable) colonial attitudes to those Aborigines who might be inconvenienced. Mr Alan Butement, the Chief Scientist to the Australian Government, said of MacDougall, whom he thought over-zealous in his concern for the Aborigines: 'He is apparently placing the affairs of a handful of natives above those of the British Commonwealth of Nations'.²⁸

The Commission was hailed by some commentators as a timely act, which would unmask British duplicity, identify injustice done to Aborigines and potentially pave the way for just restitution. In many respects it accomplished all of these, but for the Aboriginal participants there were difficulties of a more practical sort. The Commission was investigating events that had for the most part taken place thirty years before. While the documentary sources were relatively easily tapped, much evidence representing the Aboriginal point of view had to be presented in the form of oral testimony. In preparation for the Royal Commission the writer and another researcher (Maggie Brady) worked for some months collecting information on the use of the land, how the people migrated in to Ooldea, the move to Yalata, and recollections of the bomb tests. Being asked to recall events that had taken place so long ago was a perplexing and sometimes confusing process. Some memories were also very painful, some were embarrassing. For example, people had to explain why they (or perhaps their parents) left the land, perhaps why they were unable to return. Some people were only children when they had walked in to the mission at Ooldea. The exact location of some rockholes was forgotten. People's confidence in the country and their ability to survive in it had been eroded. Many rockholes, without regular visits for maintenance, would have become silted up and the water difficult to recover. One man stated, with reference to his relative lack of knowledge about the land, 'I was in the

²⁷ McClelland *et al.* 1985:2.

²⁸ Quoted in Milliken 1986:94.

mayi [food]²⁹ too long'. By this he meant that he had been away from the land and living at the mission for so long that much knowledge about the land and how to survive in it was lost.

There were also some events that people would prefer to forget. After she had given evidence at Maralinga, and the official party had departed, an Aboriginal woman who had spoken wept because she found the memory of the past and the recollection of those who had died so painful. Several key Aboriginal witnesses who gave evidence when the Royal Commission sat at Maralinga anticipated payment or recompense for their role. Instead of any immediate payments to settle the business, there were protracted discussions about 'compensation' for loss of use of the land, or actual damage incurred either to the land or to people as a result of the tests. The process raised Aboriginal people's expectations but, at the time of writing, no compensation had been paid to individuals. This tended to confirm, for some, that governments promised much but did very little.

Return to Oak Valley had been undertaken on the assumption that land beyond the Maralinga section itself was safe and uncontaminated. The Royal Commission raised questions about the extent of the contamination that made Aborigines increasingly uneasy about the land they lived upon. Many stories of contamination were unsupported by fact but the findings of very low levels of contamination at Oak Valley in 1987 tended to confirm a view held by some that the land had indeed been made too dangerous to live upon. While reassurance came from many quarters, living at Oak Valley was never quite the same again.

The desire of an increasingly self-conscious Australian government to slough off the mantle of colonialism caught the Aborigines in its inexorable processes. Making the facts of the tests clear and developing a proper understanding of the consequences of testing atomic devices, particularly in terms of environmental contamination, were matters that were rightly accorded a high priority. However, the Aborigines were involved in processes, largely beyond their control, which were the responses of others to events that had not been of the Aborigines' making. The Commission was legitimated by reference to events that had taken place in the 1950s. In that it sought to provide a framework to remedy past wrongs it was justified. But the process to accomplish this was not an unalloyed pleasure for the Aboriginal people who endured much hardship and heartache in Australia's attempts to right Australia's wrongs.

Return to the land

The development of Yalata from 1952, first by the Lutheran Church and subsequently by community advisors, had aimed to provide employment and an economic base, good housing, a health service, water, showers and access to other services in the nearest town (Ceduna) 200 km away. Hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent in this endeavour over many years. However, progress in achieving these goals was slow. Funds for housing were not made available until the 1980s, the highly saline drinking water supply was inadequate, business ventures like a sheep station were often on the verge of collapse, employment opportunities were limited. The community was often paralysed after alcoholic sprees that brought everything to a standstill.³⁰ In 1982, when some of the southern Pitjantjatjara voted with their feet, so to speak, and left for the Maralinga lands, they did so because the

²⁹ *Mayi* means vegetable food (often in contradistinction to *Kuka*, meat) but is used in this context to mean mission food (rations) which included flour, but could also include tinned meat.

³⁰ Brady and Palmer 1984.

opportunity of living on their traditional lands and away from the disruptions of community life was the more attractive alternative. However, the sums of money that had been spent did have positive results. By 1988 there was a large and well-equipped school, a new modern store, and an Aboriginal-controlled health service; over a dozen new houses had been built between 1985 and 1988, and there were increased employment opportunities, particularly with the implementation of the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP).³¹

Successive governments have provided funding for outstations because it is considered that outstations provide a better future for some Aborigines. It is argued that by allowing Aborigines to live in the manner and in the places that they choose, away from the destructive aspects of settlement life, a better future might be had.³² For the Oak Valley residents, as for other Aborigines who have chosen to move to outstations, there is a price to pay for abandoning the main settlement.

By leaving Yalata the Oak Valley residents gave up any real and immediate opportunity to gain benefits from the progress that had been made at Yalata in providing modern facilities and improving health. Oak Valley has few of these benefits. The outstation is eight hours drive from Yalata across poor dirt roads. There is no potable ground water and all supplies for drinking must be delivered by truck from the railway at Watson 160 km to the southeast, though in good seasons some is now available in tanks supplied from water catchment sheds when it rains. There are no houses, no toilets, no showers.³³ The health service operates out of a caravan or more usually from the back of a Toyota. People sleep on the ground, are prey to frequent and multiple infections and depend upon an irregular supply of store food delivered once a fortnight from Yalata. While Oak Valley is, on the positive side, peaceful, for there is no alcohol permitted, it is isolated. Children receive a very partial education and employment opportunities are few.

Commercial enterprises are more or less non-existent and there is little opportunity to develop economic activities. Tourism is occasionally discussed but the desert is very remote and lacks spectacular vistas or recreational opportunities. Moreover there is very substantial resistance from many Aborigines to allowing non-Aborigines to enter the lands. Mining is seen as equally problematic by the Aborigines, and exploration to date has revealed nothing of commercial worth. Community development projects, in a community that lacks any superstructure, where cash available for capital works is extremely limited and where there is no training and no supervision, are difficult to implement or sustain.

Not all Yalata people have returned to Oak Valley, indeed a substantial portion of the Aborigines remain at Yalata, building upon some of the progress that has been made there. There is considerable movement between the two settlements, but both have developed their own separate identities marked by differing attitudes to the return to the desert. Some Aborigines at Yalata consider that return to country is counter-productive to the process of allowing Aborigines to take a place in the governance of their own affairs, since major decisions about community programmes, capital works and employment schemes are made at Yalata and controlled by the Yalata Council. The divisions that surface when the Yalata residents' views are held in contradistinction to the views of the Oak Valley residents perhaps sum up some of the difficulties facing Aborigines in the post-self-management era.

31 For a detailed account of the scheme see Sanders 1988.

32 See for example, Commonwealth of Australia 1987:13-16; Coombs 1977:3.1-3.4.

33 Since this paper was first written in 1988 some progress has been made at Oak Valley in the provision of services. By the end of 1989 the community had limited shower facilities and a small solar-powered refrigeration unit.

ABORIGINES AND ATOMIC TESTING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Moving away from settlements to outstations consolidates cultural values and re-establishes links with the land. On the other hand, there is a diminution of the possibilities with respect to economic opportunities, services are more difficult and more costly to provide. In a community where there is no reticulated water, no ground water within 50 km that could be used even for washing, no electricity and no houses, demands that government bodies should spend huge sums on the development of a community infrastructure are financially, and practically, unrealistic. Nevertheless, it is also true that it was never the wish of the Aboriginal people to have a settlement created at Yalata, or to have huge sums invested in it. That choice was made for them in the context of the diverse events already described.

The pendulum of government policies

The southern Pitjantjatjara have responded to a variety of government policies and missionary activities over the last seventy years. These policies and activities are manifest in a series of disconnected processes which have been typified by inconsistency. One policy or series of actions sought to remedy or ameliorate an earlier one, which in turn had been implemented for the good of the Empire or of Christ's kingdom on earth. In these processes the Aborigines were forced, as generally powerless participants, to generate strategies to accommodate the changes, most of which, historically at least, they were unable to influence or alter directly. This resulted in their being faced with a series of dilemmas, often insidious choices resulting from circumstances and conditions which were not of their own making.

Settlement at Ooldea (which was a matter of choice) was attractive because of the provision of rations. But the UAM was an active participant in the process by providing the rations as an attraction offered to recruit converts to the Christian faith. The failure of the UAM to maintain the mission and the squabble over who should take responsibility for the people who lived there meant the residents had to decide where to go next. However, the decision was also important to two other groups of people who set about attempting to influence it. MacDougall was unwilling to see people scattered across the Woomera Rocket Range and forbade the people to go north. The Lutherans, who were eager to have the Aborigines in their mission, trucked them south. The relative proximity of Yalata and the offer of care and rations to be provided there meant that it became the realistic choice for the majority. However, the location was far from being their preferred destination, being yet further away from their desert homelands than Ooldea had been.

Meanwhile, return to that desert had become not only impractical, but forbidden. It suited the British and Australian governments in the 1950s to believe that the land was of no importance to desert Aborigines, and that the area, which was an ideal place to perform the tests, was more or less empty. Later, as government ministers, advisors and the voting public recognised the importance of that land to the Aboriginal owners, the Aborigines were permitted to return to areas they had been encouraged to leave. However, blasting a people's land with atomic devices is not without its repercussions. Radioactive contamination lingers, seeding doubts as to the safety of the land. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of dollars had been spent establishing the community at Yalata, which had the effect of ensuring that it was the place where the services and opportunities were provided. The Aborigines did not wish to have their settlement located at Yalata, nor did they wish to be persuaded that their future lay with separation from, rather than association with, their culture and their land. Once people were moved to Yalata, the sums of money allocated for community development were spent at that location, not on a settlement in their own country. Moreover it is unlikely, in the near future at least, that

massive expenditure would be made available to duplicate at the outstation the facilities already provided at Yalata.

The results of the past are not necessarily immutable but maybe their mark is indelible. It was perhaps because of this that the southern Pitjantjatjara chose the term 'Maralinga Tjarutja' to describe their new identity as owners and occupiers of the Maralinga lands. They said they wanted the word 'Maralinga' included in their title. This was not because it was in any way a traditional term. It was not even Pitjantjatjara. It was a word borrowed from another language by non-Aborigines to identify a place where a particularly non-Aboriginal activity occurred.³⁴ However, the southern Pitjantjatjara considered that their past was tied up with what had happened at Maralinga and their present was strongly affected by the consequences of what had happened there also. They wanted non-Aborigines to understand the importance of these events to their past and present. Now that Aborigines in Australia are being given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own affairs they have choices which were not afforded them in the past. But these choices are not made in a vacuum, for the events of the past have repercussions which are not of Aboriginal making. The development of self-management in the contexts described here has meant for the southern Pitjantjatjara that they can now start to determine their own affairs, and make choices about their future. However, they now face a series of dilemmas in making these choices. These are as much a product of the past and their alienation from the decision-making process, as they are a part of the present and their inclusion in it.

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Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this paper was read at the Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies in Darwin, 1988. The author thanks Jon Altman, Maggie Brady, Bob Layton and Sally White for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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34. The site was named Maralinga on 25 November 1953 by Mr A. Butement who was the chief scientist of the Department of Supply (Milliken 1986:72) at a meeting which was held, presumably, at Salisbury, SA (Symonds 1985:233). Millikin (1986:3) erroneously claims that the term was introduced by Aborigines to describe the range and meant 'field of thunder'. Mr Butement, on being asked, stated that he could remember nothing about the matter so 'there was no point in keeping on with me about it. (pers comm 1 July 1988). In fact the word is derived from a language of the Cobourg Peninsular in the Northern Territory, which means 'thunder'. It was probably taken by Butement or one of his colleagues from a popular Aboriginal wordlist which in turn had extracted it from Curr, *The Australian race* (1886, vol. 1:268-9). *Tjarutja* is a Pitjantjatjara term. *Tjaru* is a spatial adverb which has the meaning 'down from, south of', while *tja* is an associative suffix, meaning 'of' or 'from'. (See Institute for Aboriginal Development 1987:138; 131.)

ABORIGINES AND ATOMIC TESTING IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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