

Book reviews

Mission Girls: Aboriginal women on Catholic Missions in the Kimberley, Western Australia, 1900–1950, by Christine Choo, 350 pp, University of Western Australia Press, 2001, ISBN 1 876268 55 7 pbk \$38.95.

Christine Choo's exploration of the lives of Aboriginal women in Catholic missions in the Kimberleys between 1900 and 1950 is an important contribution to historical analyses of Kimberley missions in this colonial period. It was short-listed for the 2002 Australian Historical Association W.K. Hancock Prize, the non-fiction category of the 2001 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards and the Christina Smith Award of the National Community History Awards.

Choo approaches her topic by focusing on the Pallottine missions at Beagle Bay and Broome in the West Kimberley and the Benedictine mission at Kalumburu (formerly Pago or Drysdale River Mission) in the east Kimberley. Choo has drawn extensively on archival and historical documents and has used these in conjunction with narratives from oral interviews with a number of women who grew up at these missions to create an impressively researched work. Choo is at pains throughout to reveal the ways in which Aboriginal women exerted their agency and employed strategies of resistance amidst a period of profound acculturation. Insofar as Choo discusses not just the 'structures, processes and institutional apparatuses ... including the legislation, the bureaucracy ... and the Church' (p xvii), but also changing economic conditions in the Kimberleys as the region became settled by Europeans and others, this work provides a well-balanced exploration of these issues. In relation to the latter, particularly poignant is her description on pages 273–4 of the poor health of Aborigines who had not come into the missions in the Wyndham district towards the end of World War II.

Choo argues in her introduction that Aboriginal women have been largely ignored and made invisible in accounts of the development of the north-west. This work goes a large way towards rectifying this. Choo treats her material thematically, and thus, after she has laid some foundations about the 'Kimberleys and its people' and 'Catholic missions in the Kimberley', the chapters deal with different aspects of Aboriginal women's experience of these missions. In Chapter Three Choo discusses Aboriginal women on the pearling coast, mainly concentrating on Beagle Bay mission. Similarly, Chapter Four deals mainly with Beagle Bay in its discussions of 'homes for wayward women'. Chapter Five focuses on the removal of 'half-caste' children from their mothers, and the government policy and legislation underpinning this, particularly relevant in this era of the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report on the Stolen Generations and more recently, the release of the movie 'Rabbit Proof Fence'. In Chapter Six Choo discusses

the failed first and only attempt to establish an Order of Indigenous nuns. I found this chapter particularly valuable, for as Choo herself says, a conspiracy of silence has tended to surround this endeavour, both from the Church and among the women themselves who joined the Order. In Chapter Seven Choo discusses mission marriage with respect to Kalumburu /Pago, and the disjunction between what constituted right-way marriage for Aboriginal people versus the missionaries' attempts to break down this aspect of tradition. In Chapter Eight Choo discusses the war, and the impact upon Aboriginal people by virtue of the internment of German Pallottine priests, the stationing of American troops in their country, and the bombing of Drysdale River Mission.

Despite my overall commendation of the book, there are some things within Choo's work with which I wish to take issue. On a sheerly stylistic level, Choo italicises the words *native*, *full-blood*, *half-caste*, *white*, *coloured*, *indigent* and so on throughout the text. These are words derived from historical and archival texts, and their italicisation is meant to draw attention to 'the implicit and explicit racism of the naming group' (p. xx). For me, as a reader, the effect of their italicisation throughout was to reinforce these words, rather than to critique them by diminishing them as any kind of salient descriptors. In my view, Choo's intention would have been better served using a different stylistic device, perhaps by placing such words in inverted commas. This was particularly the case given that Aboriginal English words – *wrong*, *straight*, *skin*, *promise*, as well as Aboriginal words such as *ramba*, *pelmanga* and so forth – are also italicised. The kind of attention Choo wishes to draw to Aboriginal words such as these is surely different from that which she wishes to draw to the other terms she italicises. The italicisation of both does not serve them well, serving to problematise the former but, if taken consistently, also the latter.

Secondly, I found it peculiar that Choo could devote so much time to the mission at Beagle Bay, with scarcely a mention of Lombadina mission (which does not even merit an index entry). Beagle Bay and Lombadina were both run by Pallottines, although initially founded by Trappists, and Lombadina was originally established as an outpost of Beagle Bay. Elsewhere Choo comments on, and makes a case for, the 'close connections' between Beagle Bay and Drysdale River mission (p. 83). She fails, however, to comment on the close relationship between Beagle Bay and Lombadina. Given the movement and links (certainly contemporarily, but also during the era that Choo describes) between people at Lombadina (and, today, the adjoining Djarindjin community) and those at Beagle Bay, this omission seemed glaring. Among the six postulant Aboriginal nuns at Beagle Bay that Choo discusses in Chapter Six, for example, at least one came from Lombadina. In addition, many Lombadina couples were married at the mission at Beagle Bay. There are also important differences between these two missions; children were not brought to Lombadina from elsewhere in the Kimberleys in significant numbers as they were to Beagle Bay. The differences in such practices between these two closely-related and closely-situated missions are notable (and have distinct contemporary ramifications in these communities) and in my view are worthy of some comment in a work of this kind.

Despite these criticisms Choo's is an impressive work and should be welcomed by all who are interested in the history of north-west Australia, as well as those who are interested in Aboriginal affairs in Australia generally. One of the book's overall offerings to readers is its specific focus on Aboriginal women along with its addressing of

complex questions as to how the conditions and experiences of Aboriginal people in the past, and their reactions to these, continue to shape their experiences of the present.

Reference

Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission 1997, *Bringing them home: report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*, Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra.

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It's not the money it's the land: Aboriginal stockmen and the equal wages case by Bill Bunbury, 192pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2002. \$24.95.

This very readable book is based on the Radio National Hindsight series broadcast in 2000. It tells us a story of the failure of settlers' 'good intentions' towards Aboriginal people.

The storyline is quite simple and probably well-known: in many parts of northern Australia Aboriginal stock workers had been underpaid and exploited by colonial pastoralism since the late nineteenth century. When equal wages were finally awarded to Aboriginal workers in 1965, most Aboriginal people – not only workers but also their families – were forced to leave the stations (ie their countries) and live in townships with the new social problems of boredom, unemployment and alcohol, instead of enjoying racial and economic equality. Taking an overview of the history of the pastoral frontier as well as carefully examining the sequence of events leading to the introduction of the Equal Wages Case, Bill Bunbury explores the questions of 'how' and 'why' this happened, drawing on the views of professional historians, Aboriginal ex-stock workers, unionists, and many other witnesses of the event. I acknowledge Bunbury's challenging task of not only documenting the sequence of events but also locating the story in the wider map of 'assimilation' in order to learn from past mistakes. As Bunbury states, 'the equal wages story is strongly tied to issues like 'Native Title', 'welfare dependence', 'the Stolen Generations' and, both then and now, to the doctrine of 'assimilation'' (p 70).

In terms of giving an overall picture of the Aboriginal history of pastoral Australia, Bunbury's framework is mostly provided by some prominent historians such as Geoffrey Bolton, Ann McGrath and Gillian Cowlishaw: while Aboriginal people in the pastoral frontier were the victims of racism and undoubtedly exploited by the settlers, their feudalistic race relation with pastoralists was based on mutual compromise, and 'both parties informally negotiated a new arrangement' (p 23). This view has been widely accepted since the 1980s and has the advantage of emphasising how disastrous the later introduction of the Equal Wages Case was. Nevertheless, it seems to me that this view contains a serious contradiction: how could racism and exploitation coexist with acknowledgement of 'mutual interdependence' (p 12)? It should be noted that Aboriginal oral histories in most publications rarely state that their relationship with pastoralists was 'mutual', not to mention 'equal' or 'interdependent'. In many cases this view of 'mutual

interdependence' is deduced by professional historians from Aboriginal oral evidence about how it was a 'good life' living in the cattle countries. However, it is important to listen to what Aboriginal people are literally saying; they are not always acknowledging the mutual 'race relations', but are often simply stating their affection for the 'stockworking life with cattle in their countries'. In other words, it was not the settlers' treatment of Aboriginal people but their relationship with cattle and country that Aboriginal people managed to negotiate and compromise (Hokari 2001). Therefore, although Bunbury's picture of the overall history of the pastoral frontier does reflect a standard view among the historians today, I do not necessarily agree with it.

When discussing the sequence of events preceding the introduction of equal wages, Bunbury gives us much insight into the failure of assimilation theory and policy. It is hard to disagree that the introduction of equal wages was ethically unavoidable. Nonetheless, settlers' 'good intentions', based on the idea that 'Aboriginal people should have the same rights as other Australians', clearly failed. When equal wages were finally awarded to the Aboriginal workers, pastoralists refused (or could not afford) to pay all the workers they had previously employed. Other than a few skilled workers, station owners kicked most of the Aboriginal population out from 'their properties'. The well-intentioned Equal Wages Case resulted in the exile of Aboriginal population from their countries to the townships. Aboriginal people not only lost their jobs but also their access to ancestral land. Even though the latter part of this book describes some efforts to return their countries, such as the outstation movement and Aboriginal-owned station management, Bunbury is careful to emphasise that the impact of the event was so strong that there is still a long way to go to full recovery.

A key factor for understanding this failure is, according to Bunbury, the 'lack of communication'. If Aboriginal people had been informed of the expected sequence of the Equal Wages Case and had the opportunity to express their desires about the future, the shape and the effect of the Case would have been different. It is shocking to learn that the Case was discussed, prepared and introduced without any consultation with the Aboriginal workers. Even Dexter Daniels, one of the few Aboriginal unionists in Darwin, was not called to appear before the Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (p 98). Hal Wootten, Junior Counsel in the Equal Wages Case, gives his observations when they visited cattle stations:

On one side the rest of the Aboriginal community silent, uncommunicative, not making a sound, and on the other side all the white fellows in the case, the union representatives, the judges, the Commonwealth representatives, the pastoralists and absolutely no interaction or communication between the two groups. (p 95)

In my view, such a failure of communication was probably grounded in what Ghassan Hage calls the 'White Nation Fantasy': it is a disposition that both 'evil' and 'good' whitefellas tend to imagine Australia as a place for white governance (Hage 1998). In this sense the 'lack of communication' was not the dead past of assimilation policy, but is still alive today both in the 'evil' One Nation movement and in 'good' multiculturalism, and possibly even in the idea of 'self-determination'. The 'well-intentioned' idea that 'we should give Aboriginal people the same rights as us' or 'we should consider Aboriginal rights in our policy making' tacitly presumes white Australians are the governors of all Australians. Therefore, I believe Bunbury's message of learning

from the 'failure of communication' is of fundamental importance for shifting the question from 'is it a good intention?' to 'whose intention is it?'

References

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Papunya Tula: genesis and genius, edited by Hannah Fink and Hetti Perkins, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 2000, 319pp. ISBN 0734763069 (pbk.) 0734763107 (Hbk), \$50.00.

The story of how people at Papunya began painting in 1970 has been told many times in books, articles and exhibition catalogues, notably by Geoff Bardon, the art teacher who started it all. The essays published in this lavishly illustrated catalogue of the retrospective exhibition in 2000 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales add some depth to earlier accounts and bring the story up to date. Several of the contributors provide overviews of the painting movement from different perspectives: the editors outline the various styles and practices characteristic of the work of individual artists and of successive periods; Vivien Johnson's 'brief history' focuses on the intentions of the artists and on the strategies and tactics of those engaged to manage the painting company as 'advisers', 'coordinators' and 'field officers'; and Fred Myers discusses the processes by which the market for the paintings was developed. Paul Carter provides 'a critical account of the movement's beginnings' in 1971 and 1972, and Bardon himself reflects on his interactions with the artists at that time.

The contributions of several others who have been directly involved in supporting the Papunya Tula painters and organising the exhibition and marketing of their work in the past 30 years present a variety of views and viewpoints. Dick Kimber writes of his close association with Papunya Tula in the 1970s and beyond, and John Kean describes his experiences as an 'art adviser', visiting outstations in the late 1970s. Hetti Perkins interviewed Daphne Williams and tells the story of Williams' 'shrewd and steady stewardship of the company' in the twenty years since she started as a field officer in 1981. Marcia Langton contributes a discussion of the relationship of the painting to landscape and the 'sacredness of place' and Kimber offers a sampling of the dreaming stories of the Western Desert region. Splendid photographs of the artists and others - at work or posing for the camera, in their country or visiting foreign parts - are scattered through the text.

In addition to these articles, the editors provide a list of the paintings shown in the exhibition and reproduced in the book (149 by my count) with expanded accounts of the 'stories' of many of them, and biographical notes on the 49 artists represented, ten of whom are women. A lengthy chronology at the end of the volume, as well as listing

most, if not all, the important exhibitions of Papunya Tula paintings, provides additional information about the history of the community. A map shows the (approximate) location of most of the places mentioned in the text. The book has a select bibliography, including a list of exhibition catalogues, a short glossary of Aboriginal words used, notes on the contributors, and a useful index.

A certain amount of duplication and overlap is inescapable in a collection of essays like this, but the general effect is to enrich the story. Bardon's own accounts, for example, have presented him as working in an 'assimilationist' bureaucratic environment which was hostile to his efforts to encourage the use of traditional motifs, but Kimber and Carter record that the relevant Welfare Branch staff – the school principal, the settlement superintendent, and the district welfare officer – were interested and helpful supporters of the painting project in its early years. Both Kimber and Myers also stress the importance of the support that Bob Edwards at the Aboriginal Arts Board and other agencies, including the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, were able to provide in the early years.

These essays, like earlier accounts of the movement, are not altogether free of historical errors. Twice (in the articles by Johnson and by Carter) it is stated that 'two hundred' western Pintupi came to Papunya between 1963 and 1966 (the total was 115) and Johnson perpetuates the furphy that 'close to half' of those immigrants 'died within a year'. Johnson also writes of 'the prospect of physical extinction raised by the alarming death rates of the early 1960s', but this was not a prospect that could ever have disturbed anyone at Papunya, where births exceeded deaths every year and the natural increase in the two decades from 1950 to 1969 added 400 to Papunya's population. It is also misleading to suggest, as Johnson does, that the Papunya population was substantially increased as a result of 'stockmen from cattle stations across the region' being sacked. A handful of men who had come to Haasts Bluff/Papunya long before 1968 became key figures in the painting movement, but they had come to find wives. The demographic facts were that males outnumbered females in the station communities – a sure indicator of a declining population – while the reverse applied in the growing and youthful population on the reserve. Paul Carter is also guilty of two howlers when he writes of 'Citizenship rights, granted as a result of the 1967 Referendum' and of 'The Office of Aboriginal Affairs, belatedly set up four years after the Referendum': it was announced within four months and was up and running within nine months.

None of the contributors to this volume throw much light on why men at Papunya were ready to respond as they did to Bardon's tentative efforts to encourage young and old to draw and paint using the kind of images that they used in their ritual body painting and ground painting. Writers mention that Papunya people were familiar with the art and craftwork done at Hermannsburg, and refer in particular to the watercolour painters and to Albert Namatjira's period of detention at Papunya in 1959. But this work was in non-traditional styles and had not inspired imitation at Haasts Bluff/Papunya, although some of the Anmatjerre men from cattle stations to the north were selling carved and decorated wooden objects. A small clandestine trade had also been carried on for years in engraved stone and wood objects, usually offered for sale carefully wrapped in cloth. Yet in 1971 Papunya men decided to show the world their culture and, as Myers writes here, the 'painters have had a consistent view of their

work from the beginning – as “giving” (yunginpa) or “showing” (yuntininpa) their dreamings, as something “dear” (of ultimate and inestimable indigenous value)’.

The Papunya Tula painting movement has commonly been seen as an assertion of traditional culture and beliefs in response to the ‘pressures’ of assimilation policy. That policy was clearly one essential element in the combination of circumstances that produced the painting movement. The Papunya school was the place where it started, and the building and staffing of this first school in the Haasts Bluff reserve was a result of Paul Hasluck’s success in persuading his Commonwealth government colleagues to provide greatly increased funding for his ‘positive policy’. But Papunya was by no means the most likely community in Central Australia to give birth to an ‘art movement’ and then to be criticised by people in neighbouring communities for the indiscreet and improper revelation of secret-sacred designs. In contrast to the confident and outgoing Warlpiri at Yuendumu to the north who cheerfully tolerated and indeed welcomed the presence of appropriate white people at their most important ceremonies, the men at Haasts Bluff/Papunya had kept their ceremonies to themselves, and for very good reason. Their early contacts had been for the most part with missionaries and evangelists from Hermannsburg where the performance of initiation and other significant rituals had long been banned. One of the first things they learnt was that these white people, who were providing rations and other aid, wanted them to give up their most important ceremonies and adopt the Christian religion. Many people at Haasts Bluff and later Papunya made only desultory appearances at church services and prayer meetings, but it was both prudent and polite to have adopted, as they did, a policy of concealing their ceremonies from whites. This awareness of white (missionary) disapproval of the ritual life central to their culture had been instilled decades before the assimilation policy had any impact on their lives.

Other influences were at work and by 1971 the times were indeed changing. Australians were becoming reconciled to the end of the ‘White Australia’ policy. Governments through the 1960s had been stressing that ‘assimilation’ did not mean Aboriginal people ‘should lose their racial identity, or lose contact with their arts, their crafts, and their philosophy’. The marketing of Arnhem land bark paintings had been promoted and dance performances were sponsored, all in the cause of promoting a positive view of Aboriginal people, overcoming prejudice, and winning public support for the idea of their becoming part of the Australian community. The church missions were also changing their approaches, adopting a less negative view of indigenous beliefs, and the Lutheran missionaries were not immune to these influences.

The chronology in this book lists two events that might well have helped to change the perceptions of men at Papunya about how white people regarded their cultural traditions, the first in the winter of 1969:

May-June A party of over thirty Pintupi men from Papunya and Waruwiya outstation return to Yumari, an important site in the country of Uta Uta Tjangala, to perform rituals for filming by AIAS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies). (p304)

It did not prove unduly difficult to persuade senior Pintupi men to allow their rituals to be filmed: the Institute film unit had already made films with the Warlpiri at sites well-known to the Pintupi; for some of the senior men it provided their first (and last) chance to revisit their country since they had left ten or more years earlier; and

conditions were agreed upon including restrictions on the viewing of the films. In addition to the cost of hiring a tourist bus to transport the party some 400km to the west, providing food and water for a week, and meeting all the incidental costs of the expedition, the Institute paid a substantial sum of money for the privilege of making the film record. The chronology records that a similar exercise was conducted the following May and June, the year before Bardon arrived at Papunya, taking another bus to perform at a cave site, Yaru Yaru, farther west in Western Australia, and farther off the road. These two expeditions would have been impressive demonstrations – both for the Pintupi involved and for others at Papunya – that government and important white people were seriously interested in and valued the rituals and songs of their country. This would have been something of a revelation, although encounters with pastoralists and with officials would have revealed that not all whites were actively hostile to their beliefs and rituals. A third expedition was made in August 1972 to film rituals at Mitukatjiri, a site to the south and east of the Kintore Range, which, like the sites of the other films, has featured in many of the paintings. It is not difficult to find paintings made in 1971 and 1972 and reproduced in this book which seem likely to have been directly prompted by these visits. The ‘giving’ and the ‘showing’ of the ceremonies the men performed at these places was certainly done in the same spirit that the paintings have been offered to the world in the following thirty years.

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Rethinking Indigenous education: culturalism, colonialism and the politics of knowing, by Cathryn McConaghy, PostPressed, Queensland, 2000, 312p. ISBN 1876682027 (Pbk).

Although addressed to those who practice and theorise Indigenous education, Cathryn McConaghy’s critique of ‘culturalism’ should stimulate any historian of race relations, colonisation or Indigenous resistance – that is, just about any reader of or writer for *Aboriginal History*. However *Rethinking Indigenous education* is not as accessible as it should be. Editing would have slimmed it down and eliminated minor lapses of wording. This writer has not thought much about how best to engage her readers, perhaps a by-product of a certain political righteousness and of confidence in her own critical apparatus.

McConaghy’s critiquing strategy is to describe in abstract terms the objects of her critique – varieties of what she calls ‘culturalism’ – and then to refer to instances of this or that ‘culturalism’ in the literature (mainly education studies) on Australian Indigenous people. These instances could have been subject to close reading, with plenty of quotation, but they are not. Rather than showing the reader what is problematic about the ‘culturalism’ of a particular book or paper, McConaghy merely tells the reader what, in her view, makes it an instance of that regrettable intellectual tendency. We have to trust her paraphrases of these errant texts, since she has afforded us very little quotation that would allow a reader to interrogate the author’s reading.

Of course, I noticed this particularly when my own work came under scrutiny. I question some of her summations of my views; for example, she finds that in my PhD thesis¹, cited extensively in chapter five, I attributed to the Northern Territory system of 'welfare colonialism' an intention to 'denigrate and control' Indigenous people. To attribute such an intention, she points out, is an instance of 'culturalism', for it reduces 'whites' to an essential characteristic subjectivity. A fair reading of my thesis would find it guilty of no such reduction. One of the themes of the thesis is the different ways that pastoralist employers and Welfare Branch officials considered and enacted their relationships with Aboriginal people under the policy of 'assimilation'. The theoretical framework underpinning the argument displaces and disunifies colonial intentionality, by drawing attention to the variously institutionalised logic of a certain colonial structure - the rationing relationship.

If I find McConaghy an unreliable reader of my own work, I am nonetheless arrested by the encompassing scope of her critique of 'culturalism'. What does McConaghy mean by 'culturalism'? 'Culturalism' is the presumption that the most important feature of a situation is the cultural differences among that situation's protagonists. Typically, 'culturalism' perceives subjectivity as determined by the characteristics of the 'culture' to which the individual subject is thought (by the observer) to belong. It explains relationships between subjects in terms given by observers' accounts of the 'culture' to which the subjects belong. It accounts for behaviour in the same terms as it describes 'identity'. 'Culturalism' is essentialist (that is, 'cultures' go on having the same qualities that each has always had, and all 'members' of that culture have those qualities). The characteristic grammar of 'culturalism' is binary. That is, 'Aboriginal' makes sense in distinction to 'non-Aboriginal', 'traditional' in distinction to 'urban', and so on.

McConaghy finds that 'culturalism' pervades the ways that intellectuals, officials and Indigenous activists (three overlapping categories of actor) talk and write about the Indigenous predicament in Australia. Were she a historian she might have traced the rise of the ideologies and vocabularies of 'Indigenous identity'. Were she a sociologist of knowledge she might have said more about the utility of 'culturalism', as when she acknowledges that 'radical culturalism' 'has been useful as an anti-colonial strategy at many sites, including projects to "Aboriginalise" Indigenous education and its support for positive discrimination as a social justice strategy has promoted many gains for Indigenous people' (p 250). However, the history of 'culturalist' discourse is no more her concern than is the elaboration of her brief suggestions of links between actors, interests and ideas. McConaghy's primary object is error - or, more positively, she believes that by overcoming 'culturalism' we will be able to 'theorise adequately' - a locution that she uses over and over again to refer to what it is that her critique enables.

According to McConaghy, there are four styles of 'culturalism' abroad in writings on Australian Indigenous education: pastoral welfarism, assimilationism, cultural relativism, and radicalism.

¹ Rowse, Tim 1989 PhD thesis University of Sydney, later published as *White power, white flour* CUP, Cambridge, 1998.

Pastoral welfarism postulates – in different terms in different circumstances – Indigenous incapacity. Certain institutions find their rationale in this postulate. McConaghy mentions ‘reserves’, but this is a problematic example as the arguments for reserves (that she does not quote) sometimes postulated Indigenous capacity to look after themselves as much as Indigenous incapacity to cope with colonial intrusion. Another example of an institution that depended on and reproduced this notion of ‘Indigenous incapacity’ is ‘the settlement’ whose various training programs would bring about certain required ‘competencies’. Christian missions have been yet another example.

The ‘Imperial humanitarian’ tradition, whether Christian or secular, propagated the idea that Indigenous Australians needed saving from their incapacities. It is a measure of the breadth of the category ‘Indigenous incapacity’ that McConaghy sees no point in distinguishing between two self-imposed humanitarian missions: saving Indigenous Australians from their own ‘incapacities’, and recognising their limited capacities – military, legal and political – to defend themselves from inhumanitarian colonists. To McConaghy, what these two different attributions of incapacity have in common is more interesting. That is typical of the unsettling effect of her work: the historian’s temptation to ethical judgment (distinguishing helpful from self-interested humanitarian impulses) is refused in favour of laying bare a discursive unity.

McConaghy says that ‘pastoral welfarism’ is a continuing discourse, but she gives no contemporary examples, such as the current policy discourse about Indigenous Australians’ ‘human capital’ and ‘social capital’ deficiencies. McConaghy prefers to see such notions as manifesting a different kind of ‘culturalism’ that she calls ‘assimilationism’. ‘Assimilationism’ is distinguished by its preoccupation with justice and equity. The point of remedying Indigenous deficiency is to make ‘them’ equal to ‘us’ according to various measures of ‘equality’. That equality is sustainable because it is based on a new Indigenous capacity for ‘self-reliance’. However, the essence of ‘assimilationism’ as a colonial ideology is that this transformation is always judged incomplete. Practitioners of ‘assimilationism’ are defined by their continuing to find reasons to tutor Indigenous Australians to mimic the tutors’ ways. Because they can never be satisfied with the result, they continually renew their mandate.

McConaghy’s examples of institutionalised ‘assimilationism’ are citizenship training programs on government settlements and in adult education and vocational, post-primary education in the Northern Territory. Her review of the research and policy literature on the role of the adult educator in remote communities makes clear the ways that ‘self-determination’ is a project of tutelage as well as of emancipation, whose by-product has been the professionalisation of adult educators. She is critical of the ‘competencies’ approach to adult education for its tendency to propagate standardised definitions of what trainees need. However, McConaghy says, when Indigenous intellectuals put forward Indigenous ‘difference’ as a corrective to such standardisation, they all too often standardise the implications of being ‘Indigenous’ – another pathway to imperfect mimicry.

McConaghy is critical of assimilationism’s aspiration to ‘universalism and social cohesion’. However, her critique is not from the standpoint of some ‘Indigenous’ alternative: A critique that supposed it knew ‘the Indigenous’ perspective would be

enslaved to culturalism's 'two-race binary'. Can those engaged in 'Indigenous studies' and 'Indigenous affairs' ever escape such a pervasive 'dichotomy'? McConaghy puts the very category 'Indigenous' in question, but she holds fast to a conception of 'colonialism'. In what terms can 'the colonised' name themselves and enunciate a common interest without falling into the 'two-race binary'? It seems to me that McConaghy is sceptical that they could ever do so.

McConaghy's third 'culturalism' is 'cultural relativism'. This project uses ethnography to inform teaching so that pedagogic practice will be harmonious with learners' culture. She sees cultural relativism as a sophisticated mask of the interests of those who espouse and practice it. McConaghy refers to the 'arrogance' of its 'white agency: of whites doing for others, respecting, tolerating and ensuring fair treatment' (p 190). Relativists kid themselves about what it takes to challenge racism, and they think achieving justice is a matter of improving the distribution of certain goods. They overstate the incommensurability of 'cultures' and they believe that education can be culturally 'neutral'.

Contrary to relativists, McConaghy insists that we need to make distinctions of value and pertinence. It is justifiable to do so as long as one is reflexive about the 'standpoint' from such judgments are being made. Because there is no knowledge or action without its 'standpoint', relativism's pretensions to neutrality are unbelievable. Her examples of the institutional expressions of relativism are programs to restore or renew Indigenous languages, education for 'community development' (where the problem is the subtly authoritative delimitation of 'community' or 'Indigenous domain'), and a search for Indigenous collaborators in intellectual production (which she judges to be to the greater advantage of the non-Indigenous). McConaghy seeks to undermine our illusions about the emancipatory impact of such programs.

By entertaining the possibility of community and individual autonomy, cultural relativism also invokes the psychology of more or less functional subjects. Psychology is yet another powerful knowledge in which to deploy notions of Indigenous inadequacy. In McConaghy's view the notion of Indigenous 'autonomy' 'depends on regimes of othering and strategies which seek to assert social distance and social difference. The consequence of the fantasy of autonomy in cultural relativism is the construction of Indigenous people as in a perpetual state of identity chaos, shock, dependency and abjectivity. It also legitimates the work of the specialists in such matters, the cross-cultural experts' whose business now flourishes in Australia (p 207).

McConaghy's last 'culturalism' is 'radicalism', a project that finds ways to invert the 'two-race binary' but enjoys only 'short-term' success whenever it does so. However the radical critique flatters the radical intellectual as the source of enlightenment. The problem with 'radical culturalism' is that it pays too little attention to 'issues of global and local capitalisms, and the patriarchal structures which support them' (p 226). It is not enough to assert the superior value of Indigenous perspectives and to empower the bearers of those perspectives, for such scenarios may leave the other non-racial and non-cultural hegemonies that affect Indigenous people untouched. The subjects of these other hegemonies are neither Indigenous nor non-Indigenous. Here McConaghy's argument is not so much against 'binaries' per se as against the elevation of the two-race binary above all others. As well as simplifying the landscape of power, the

'two-race binary' makes it necessary to produce some version of the essentially resistant Indigenous subject.

Here is a point of engagement for those who seek to write Indigenous agency into the history of Australian 'race relations'. The colonised subject is a figure of the radical intellectual's continuing concern: 'the radicalist problem of Indigenous agency' (p 238). One common solution to that 'problem' glorifies 'resistance', but this 'validates social dislocation and romanticises poverty and powerlessness' and tends to presume that Indigenous resisters will reproduce their ancient culture's values as the basis for their future flourishing. McConaghy cites Bain Attwood as one historian who seeks to avoid this construction of Indigenous agency.

McConaghy's book is the most searching essay in the politics of Indigenous representation since Bain Attwood's 1992 essay on 'Aboriginalism'.² Her exposition of the pervasive 'two-race binary' adds to Attwood's critique in volume and in scope (she, more than he, critiques the essentialising of 'non-Indigenous'). Attwood came up with a series of recommendations toward an improved ethics of representation. In that code there were foreseeable tensions between his injunction to consult and to collaborate with Aboriginal people and his injunction to question 'Aboriginalist' orthodoxies. As McConaghy shows, some of the Indigenous Australians with whom one might collaborate are so empowered by the politics of identity that they are unlikely to aid a deconstruction of the categories of the two-race binary. McConaghy's critique of the empowerment of radical intellectuals and cross-cultural experts refuses to distinguish between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous beneficiaries of 'culturalism'.

So what lessons does McConaghy draw for readers persuaded by her argument that 'culturalism works to re-produce, rather than disrupt, colonial social formations' (p251)? In her remarks about the pervasive logic of 'assimilationism', McConaghy implies that she is not allied to any current public policy philosophy on Indigenous affairs:

Assimilationism depends on a racialised dichotomy, a dualism which exists as a problem which needs to be rectified. This dichotomy continues to be the focus of social policy, whether it is expressed as self-determination (the potential for one group to be more like another group, specifically in terms of the relative freedoms of the latter group), mainstreaming (the ability of a group to access the system of production, distribution and consumption of the larger group), integration (the ability of groups to co-exist, supposedly with each group remaining intact) or reconciliation (the desire for groups to share a social system in ways which address the social injustices of the past). (p187-8)

For McConaghy the fruit of critique is nothing more nor less than self-awareness, a reflexive openness to seeing all discourse on 'culture' – however emancipatory in intention and however respectfully informed by a sense of the other – as having multiple powerful effects. The 'reproduction of colonial social formations' may be the one constant effect, but McConaghy admits that there are others, local and short-term, that may enhance some people's room to move within the 'colonial social formation'. Whether these beneficiaries are Indigenous or non-Indigenous or both will depend on

² Attwood, Bain 1992, 'Introduction' in *Power, knowledge and Aborigines*, B Attwood and J Arnold (eds), La Trobe University Press, *Journal of Australian Studies* Special edition 35: i- xvi.

the circumstances and on the standpoint of the person making the analysis. Her hope is that we will not be restricted to talking and writing as if 'culture' is all. 'Post-culturalism contends that "culture" is significant, but not always the most significant factor in issues of pedagogy and social policy, and can never be disassociated from issues of class, gender, racialisation and other forms of social analysis' (p 44).

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Phyllis Kaberry and me: anthropology, history and Aboriginal Australia, Sandy Toussaint, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1999, xiv + 128pp, \$32.95.

Insofar as it enhances the reputation of the mid-twentieth century anthropologist, Phyllis Kaberry, Toussaint's book is to be applauded. In the 1930s, Kaberry pioneered the anthropological appreciation of Aboriginal women's social, cultural and religious roles, refuting the then-dominant view that women in 'traditional' societies were no more than mundane drudges, oppressed by the spiritual as well as secular dominion of men. From her Kimberley fieldwork, she argued that women's economic, social and religious activities were complementary, not inferior or subservient, to those of their menfolk. After this, she carried out research in New Guinea, moving in the mid-1940s to African studies, in which her reputation rests primarily on her work among the Nso'. However, it is on Kaberry as a Kimberley ethnographer that this book focusses, moving on to make some comparison with a later Kimberley anthropologist, Toussaint herself.

Whether the understatement is intentional or not, Toussaint is right to acknowledge that this 'is not an exhaustive biography of Phyllis Kaberry.' The book combines biographical snapshots with autobiographical snippets, textual explication, reflections on shifts within the discipline of anthropology and observations on change and continuity in Kimberley Aboriginal cultures. It's an interesting and potentially fruitful combination, but Toussaint doesn't quite bring it off. Partly, perhaps, this can be attributed to brevity; there's only so much that can be accomplished in just over a hundred pages. Beyond that, however, is poor judgment on how best to use the available limited space.

It starts well enough, with a deft biographical sketch of Kaberry, illuminating a woman of formidable intellect but also of humility, generosity and sensitivity. The second chapter stumbles badly. Toussaint devotes thirty pages to recounting in meticulous detail, chapter by chapter, Kaberry's major Australian study, *Aboriginal woman: sacred and profane*. Surely she could have quickly sketched the main points of Kaberry's ethnography, directed the interested reader to the text itself, and moved on to explore such matters as the genesis and initial reception of the book, and the intellectual context in which it was conceived. Although at one point Toussaint insinuates that this is a 'contextualised biography', there's precious little contextualising of the 1939 publication that is central to this later meditation. The point that it was an innovative and challenging study is made, but never elaborated. Intellectual 'context' comprises nothing more than a medley of brief, disconnected remarks on a few ideas of Kaberry's contemporar-

ies. Indeed, I can only wonder about the grasp on intellectual context of an author who designates as 'a rare and prophetic comment' Kaberry's statement that 'injury to social structure and activities contingent on white contact may lie at the basis of the problem' of Aboriginal depopulation. These were not 'rare' or 'prophetic' insights; they were, among commentators of the day, commonplace to the point of banality.

If the intellectual context in which *Aboriginal Women* was conceived is treated cursorily, so too are its author's personal connections with other anthropologists at the time. Toussaint intimates that Kaberry was not the only female anthropologist at the University of Sydney in the late 1930s, but nothing more. In fact, these women, including, in addition to Kaberry, Ursula McConnel, Caroline Kelly, Camilla Wedgewood and Olive Pink, maintained a lively correspondence among each other and with the wider anthropological community. Attention to their varying views on conducting ethnography among 'native' women may have both illuminated Kaberry's enterprise and enlivened Toussaint's account. Among Kaberry's colleagues who are mentioned, AP Elkin is represented inconsistently. In the first chapter we're told that Elkin, aware of the incompleteness of his own ethnographies because of his inability to enter the female domain, played a major role in fostering Kaberry's investigations of Aboriginal women's culture and religiosity. In the final chapter Elkin has transmuted into one of several anthropologists 'whose misinformed views about the cultural and religious heritage of women she rejected'.

Toussaint begins the autobiographical section of her book with some self-consciousness, confessing to feeling 'uncomfortable about revealing aspects of myself to strangers' and admitting that parts of her life will be 'treated with ambiguity and silence.' Occasionally, self-consciousness slips into self-indulgence. Usually, however, she handles adroitly the reflexivity she espouses in ethnographic work. The development of that reflexive mode, she rightly points out, is the source of some of the most salient differences between her own and Kaberry's ethnography. The other difference highlighted is in their respective attitudes toward colonialism, and on this point Toussaint ventures well beyond what can plausibly be sustained by such scanty research.

In her conclusion she states that Kaberry may have been a 'somewhat naive "child of imperialism"' and that she appears 'to have worked *unquestioningly* in a colonial era' (Toussaint's italics). Yet back in the first chapter, we're told that in 1946 she complained to the British Colonial Office about the Nso' being removed from their land, and that one of her 'primary and ongoing' concerns 'was that British colonisation had engendered spatial and political crises among the Nso' and neighbouring groups such as the Fulani.' Perhaps the allegations of Kaberry's naivety and unquestioning attitude are meant to be confined to her Australian writings (Toussaint is unclear about this). Even so, such vast claims about an author's views need to be substantiated by a far more thorough appraisal of Kaberry's writings, unpublished as well as published, than Toussaint has ventured. Its as if, having failed to find in Kaberry's published oeuvre some blunt and blatant denunciation of colonialism, the only possible conclusion is the earlier anthropologist's political naivety. I'm not suggesting that Kaberry should be, or can be, reconstructed as a political activist; merely that it is illegitimate to jump to conclusions about an 'unquestioning' attitude toward colonialism on the basis of a few published ethnographies plus some recollections of, and correspondence with, a pastoralist friend. Having jumped to this conclusion, yet still wanting to portray her predecessor in a pos-

itive light, Toussaint has no recourse but special pleading on her behalf. That's something Phyllis Kaberry would be better off without.

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A Gumbaynggir Language Dictionary, Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Cooperative, Steve Morelli (comp.) 2001, Aboriginal Studies Press for AIATSIS, Canberra. ISBN 0 85575 383 8, 160pp.

This is an attractively produced and solidly bound book which incorporates all materials which have been compiled on the Gumbaynggir language. It is about B5 in size, a handy size for use. No doubt to the embarrassment of the publishers, Gumbaynggir is spelt Gumbaynnggir on its cover (though this is easily not noticed), when it should be Gumbaynggir as on the title pages inside. Note also that the dictionary entry spells the word Gumbaynggirr, and the gloss has Gumbaynggir as in the title. Of course, for those who know this area, the language name has had a wide variety of spellings, some of which have led to spelling pronunciations of the name which are at variance with what was the traditional pronunciation.

Gumbaynggir, with its various dialect and clan groups, was spoken on the east coast of New South Wales, covering the area between Grafton and south of Woolli on the coast, down to Nambucca Heads and Scotts Head, and inland to Wollomombi some 40km east of Armidale, northwest to include Guyra and Ben Lomond, north east and passing east of Glen Innes until it encountered dialects of Yugambah-Bundjalung west of Grafton and the Clarence River. The map names the following dialects: Baanbay to the west, Gurubida in the centre, Gambalamam and Budaabang to the south, and Garigalay, Jambiny, Yuraala, Magan.girr and Mirragalgi to the east.

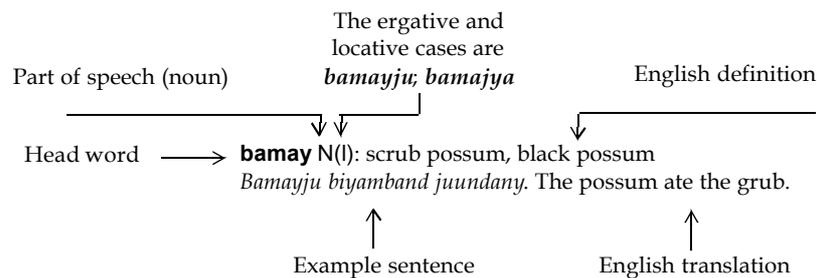
The book has a map in which names for neighbouring groups are spelt in the Gumbaynggir way, and where there are known Gumbaynggir place names, they are included with the English place names, many of which are clearly versions of the original Gumbaynggir names. The map also included the various dialect names.

A dictionary such as this one is produced for literate adults, in particular Gumbaynggir people who may know little or none of the traditional language, and who are also not well-practised in the skill of consulting dictionaries. There is a foreword before the map, and following the map is a short introduction, a list of most abbreviations, a section on the sounds of Gumbaynggir, and sample entries, showing the reader what to look for in the entries. The dictionary listing of Gumbaynggir to English occupies some 86 pages, and an English to Gumbaynggir Word-Finder occupies 41 pages. A grammar section follows (p. 143-157), a couple of pages show the Gumbaynggir section system, and the last page the kinship terms. The Gumbaynggir to English section includes examples illustrating the words and affixes and their use, and the lay-out is very easy to read.

The introduction lists sources for the dictionary, with succinct annotations ('excellent', 'useful', 'unreliable', 'not useful', 'mainly ethnographic', etc). Sources listed date from 1894 ('some useful information') to 1978, and I would assume later in audiotaped material that Brother Steve Morelli obtained from a comparatively recently deceased speaker.

Sources for the dictionary include WE Smythe's work on the northern dialect area (he was a GP in Grafton, and wrote his grammar in the 1940s). Morelli regarded the manuscripts of Gerhardt Laves and the tape collections and Gumbaynggir grammar of Diana Eades as the most important sources of information for the work. 'As far as possible,' he writes, 'example sentences come from actual texts of original speakers. When these come from Northern speakers they have regularly been modified to be in line with the Southern dialect, (p6). Morelli also says on that page that '(t)he work does not pretend to be definitive', and he welcomes reports on any errors found.

Below is shown one of the sample entries (p14). Morelli shows what each section of the entry tells, a useful guide to those not familiar with dictionaries, as well as a useful reminder to those who are, who often skate over fine detail. I have also shown two other related entries to show reference to sources.



Yuriinyja N (l) LdS:Urunga. [-> **Yuruun.ga**]

Yuruun.ga N (l): Urunga. [LdS has **Yuriinyja**; RMc claims it comes from 'lengthen (yuruunda) the bridle reins!'; HB says it comes from the long spit of an island in the river.]

Most English to Gumbaynggir entries are simple finder list entries, but a number have sub-entries, e.g.

carry: **maana**

~ around **wurra-maanyi**

~ on back **jugumba**

~ on head **galiija**

~ on shoulders **gambarri, ngamili, galiija**

The grammar section is well set up to help those not familiar with grammatical concepts, and an illustration helps clarify the concept of three degrees of distance. Explanations are illustrated with examples.

This dictionary should prove a valuable resource for Gumbaynggir people and others interested in this area of Australia, and is a credit to the work of Steve Morelli and the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative.

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Rednecks, eggheads and blackfellas: a study of racial power and intimacy in Australia, by Gillian Cowlshaw, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1999, xix + 352pp, ISBN 1865080764. \$38.95 pbk.

In 1975, Gillian Cowlshaw arrived at Bulman in Southern Arnhem land to undertake anthropological fieldwork with a group of Rembarrnga people. She had chosen Bulman in the belief – then current within Australian anthropology – that researchers needed to locate themselves in isolated communities and so minimise interaction with local settler society. Only by doing so could they hope to achieve total immersion in the day to day lives of their informants, and thus come to truly understand the complexity and richness of Aboriginal culture.

Cowlshaw's first weeks of fieldwork at Bulman reinforced her sense of the value of anthropological tradition and her admiration for mentors such as Les Hiatt. It became clear to her why so much intellectual energy had been invested in documenting the intricacies of kinship amongst the peoples of Arnhem Land. Within days she found herself not just taking part in the everyday life of the women's camp, but being offered a place that defined her identity within their kinship system and brought a wealth of obligations to the Rembarrnga.

At the same time, Cowlshaw found her new identity as *Ngaritjan* provoked ambivalent reactions and sometimes aggression from local whites and some Rembarrnga men. Her ambiguous presence as both kin and anthropologist also sparked anger at what had happened in the recent past and fear about what the future might bring. The Rembarrnga had settled at Bulman between 1968 and 1971 after being forced off Mainoru Station, about 100 kilometres to the south, when the station – which had been their home since the 1920s – had been sold to an overseas company which wanted to retain only a few 'full-time' Aboriginal workers. Since then economic initiatives at Bulman had failed due to poor management, low funding and the inability of government officials to understand or respect the cultural aspirations of the Rembarrnga. Complicating matters, the cause of the migration to Bulman had caused the Rembarrnga people to become more open and defiant in asserting their ownership of country and the continuity of ancestral law. When Cowlshaw arrived Bulman was, in her words, a place of 'confusion, mystery, horror, excitement and humour.' It was a place she had never dreamed of encountering, and one that the discipline of anthropology seemed to offer no intellectual resources to explain satisfactorily.

In retrospect, however, Bulman was the ideal fieldwork location. *Rednecks, eggheads and blackfellas* reads as testimony to the ways in which Cowlshaw's experiences, on her first and subsequent visits to the settlement during the 1970s, influenced the

course of her research. She has since offered much critical insight into the ways in which knowledge of Indigenous Australian culture has been produced through the interaction between Indigenous informants, anthropologists, pastoralists and government officials. She has been concerned to show how, in academic and public discourse, notions such as objectivity, individualism and progress are concepts with a specific cultural geography. That geography has been profoundly shaped by our colonial past, with race as its most salient feature. So too, Cowlshaw argues, have matters of fact about Indigenous people been produced with these ideas.

This concern is reflected in Cowlshaw's unusual title for the book, which she argues underscores that in their interactions with each other and with Aboriginal people, 'redneck' pastoralists and 'egghead' anthropologists drew on a shared body of racialised knowledge. Even so, the title is misleading, in so far as book does not offer the sustained analysis of early interactions between anthropologists, pastoralists and the Rembarrnga that the title implies.

Through her focus on the interaction between the Rembarrnga and white pastoralists in Southern Arnhem Land, Cowlshaw offers a sustained analysis both of the obvious and the many subtle ways that race has determined the social and ontological categories shaping the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Northern Australia. However, much of what Cowlshaw has to say about the drama on Mainoru station and at Bulman between 1920 and the early 1980s warrants consideration in broader debates about the dynamic of race in Australian history. Her book requires that we reconsider whether the hierarchy of race that determined everyday interactions between Indigenous people and Europeans in northern Australia until the 1970s has indeed been dissolved by ostensibly enlightened policies of self-determination. One is drawn to the disturbing conclusion that we need to talk about race not just as a factor in history, but as a concept that retains its cognitive magnetism, albeit in more subtle, but possibly equally pernicious, ways.

The first half of *Rednecks, eggheads and blackfellas* explores the policies and techniques of policing employed by the colonial state, ostensibly to protect the Rembarrnga people, but at the same time to re-order their lives with a view to ensuring their integration within the pastoral industry. Several historians have explored of late how colonial administrators imbued the bodies of white and black people with a range of qualities that reflected faith in evolutionary discourse. The strength of Cowlshaw's study is that she shows in concrete terms how the experiences of the Rembarrnga on Mainoru were circumscribed by the construction of boundaries between racial bodies, both social groups and individuals. The Rembarrnga and other groups saw their country cut up into sites for well-defined purposes for the use of distinct classes of people. This was evident in the nomenclature routinely employed by the Native Affairs Branch of the Northern Territory to classify and manage people by virtue of where they were located: men and women housed in native quarters or blacks' camps were either 'workers' or 'dependants'; Aboriginal people beyond the station were categorised as 'bush blacks' or 'wild myalls' who threatened its civilising mission through challenging the authority of its racial hierarchy.

This was not the only way in which an economy of race shaped notions of self and community at Mainoru and Bulman. The racialised space of the station gave race exis-

tential concreteness and normalised a range of assumptions and practices governing in more mundane and intimate ways black and white interactions. Cowlshaw takes particular care to document and reflect on the regimes of training and education at Mainoru over several generations in order to illuminate the depths to which race underpinned the humanism of local whites with whom the Rembarrnga interacted and often held in high regard. Importantly, she shows that faith in racial difference could lead pastoralists to question and, on occasion, to subvert state policies and programs that drew cognitive strength from notions of race.

While race was everything to successive generations of pastoralists and agents of government, the task of civilising Aboriginal people was often mediated by localised needs and desires, both black and white. Intimacy and love could and did cross racial boundaries. White men who thought of harnessing and directing Aboriginal labour as their providential duty nonetheless accepted incorporation within the kinship systems of the women they loved. In such a world, country ancestral law remained the foundations of identity for Aboriginal men and women, but this did not stop them selectively embracing aspects of western culture, notably ideas of literacy and private property.

Still, as Cowlshaw demonstrates, the reality of racial difference never became so unsettled by the vicissitudes of day to day life as to be called into question. Assimilation policies were never genocidal in intent, but perceptions of racial superiority were so deeply internalised by pastoralists and agents of the State that they simply could not imagine a future for Aboriginal communities as anything other than European in their essential social dynamics. Nor, for that matter, was it possible for the Rembarrnga to envisage any other future for country and culture than one in which European assumptions and goods played an important role.

This point leads to the final and arguably most challenging part of the book, in which Cowlshaw analyses the failure of economic initiatives designed to help the Rembarrnga and other peoples at Bulman achieve self-determination during the 1970s. She is concerned to understand the social dynamics of Bulman in the wake of the economic restructuring of the pastoral industry, and particularly the thinking of white officials charged with creating sound economic preconditions for self-determination. What emerges is a disturbing portrait of the gulf between the public pronouncements of these officials and their private confessions of incomprehension of and, in some instances, contempt for Aboriginal culture. Much had changed by the 1970s, but Cowlshaw presents disturbing evidence to suggest that while race no longer determined social space and techniques of governance as it had during the assimilation era, it continued to inform how whites thought and spoke privately among themselves over a few beers about the supposed failings of the Rembarrnga to embrace self-determination.

Rednecks, eggheads and blackfellas is remarkable both for its contextual depth and the sharpness of its theoretical insight. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the powerful and ambiguous presence of race in Australian history and contemporary debates.

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Colonial photography and exhibitions: representations of the 'native' and the making of European identities, by Anne Maxwell, Leicester University Press, London, 1999. 243pp, ISBN: 0 718502299. \$49.50.

Normally I would not review a book which disturbed me as much as this one, but the subject matter and the issues raised, for both those of colonised and colonising heritages, make it important to consider what we might learn from the analysis offered in this volume. Maxwell sets out to explore the representation of indigenous and colonialised peoples through the performance of representations at the worlds' exhibitions and through photography. These are presented as mechanisms through which European identities were both defined and confirmed. As Maxwell correctly argues, these are linked through the cultural mechanisms which both produce and control such imaging.

The reader is taken through seven very wide ranging chapters: on the Great Exhibitions and their performances of native cultures through the device of 'the native village'; on the photography of travellers and anthropologists; and then on the shifting discourses in the representation in four places: North America (both Native Americans and African-Americans) and encompassing photographic practices as diverse as those of Edward Sheriff Curtis and F. Holland Day; Australia and New Zealand; Samoa and Hawai'i, this last a study of the use of the Hawai'ian royal family to negotiate their claims and relationship with Europeans and elites. All the chapters function as forms of case study or loci of the main themes of the volume: the links between representational discourses and those of imperialism and identity. Maxwell rightly argues that these are key processes of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

One of the problems of this volume is that it attempts to do far too much and as a result too many statements are underpinned by assumption not evidence. Key themes such as 'identity' and 'modernity' are glossed rather than explored and photographic practices, colonial experiences and indigenous responses are reduced to a homogenised predictability. The argument is forced into great sweeps and generalisations, while example follows example building up a sort of breathless causality which, however, explains little, for the examples lack serious analytical historical grounding. Great sweeps require distillation and density to give clarity of meaning and insight. Sadly here both are lacking, lost in a mire of partially-grasped detail in a reductionist spiral. Causal links are over-determined, over-direct and over-simplified and general points are substantiated by randomly relevant facts such as: Europeans were fascinated by China because they had read Marco Polo (p 58); Lindt's New Guinea photographs were not studio set-ups because New Guineans were not a 'dying race' which had been forced off the land and into European clothes (p 152); Samoan choices to be photographed in a certain styles constitutes a rejection of imperialism (p 179). Certainly these elements are part of the equation, but only parts of a much more complex set of relations. Rather, here, every one thinks the same, and photographs have only one intention, expressed through in a breathlessly adjectival style where colonialism is always 'oppressive', gaze always 'penetrating', Europeans always read the shows in a certain way, colonialism is always the reason. If x, then y must follow unproblematically.

This simplified outlook leads to a dichotomised analytical model leaving little or no room for agency, fracture or counter-narrative. For instance, the Bora ceremony pho-

tographed by Sydney photographer Charles Kerry at the end of the 1890s is cast in terms of Kerry's ideas of authenticity and the idea that he was 'duped' (fine as far as it goes) (p 155). But surely another reading of the event was that perhaps Aboriginal people were mediating in their own representation, withholding information and presenting surface not depth. Maxwell tries to demonstrate different approaches to representation, namely through the work of Thomas Andrew of Apia, Samoa, or through the use of photography by the Hawai'ian royal family to construct and disseminate their own image, especially in relation to white elites. She is quite right in this, however by this time the relentless over-determinism of her model makes any fluidity, ambiguity and nuance of argument impossible. Then there is the relentlessly presentist, anachronistic view which saturates the argument. For instance, an engraving showing Charles Walters [sic] photographing a group of Aboriginal people in 1874 is described as 'attempt[ing] to critique the voyeurism of his own practice' (p 149) and Margaret White who 'used the concept of hybridity to critique the representational practices of colonialism ... [and] appealed to the self-reflexive space provided by irony' (p 179). White is certainly an interesting photographer - and one new to me - but such presentism masks the truly remarkable qualities in her work at the Whau Lunatic Asylum.

It would seem that, to Maxwell, the sin of many 19th-century people was in their not being enlightened post-modern theorists like us, their failure to see the follies of their cultural vision or - in Maxwell's over-determined causality - their deliberate suppression of enlightened attitudes, where photographers wake up one morning and decide to produce a nice stereotype and a family visits exhibitions merely to demonstrate its adhesion to the colonial cultural hegemony. In too many ways this approach belittles the enormity and the unpredictability of colonial experience for all concerned, reducing it to a series of trite truisms and cheap value judgements. This is not to say that Maxwell is wrong in her basic identification of profoundly asymmetrical power relations, the saturating colonial ideologies and the consequences for those entangled within them, but the exercise becomes pernicious as value judgements masquerade as analysis and insight. Such relentless eliding of the processual results in an objectification of a passive, powerless, victimised 'other' set against a monolithic colonial power, and in so doing merely reproduces 19th-century tropes through different grids.

Another problem with this book is its inaccuracies. While the odd slip is forgivable (who can truly put their hand on their heart and claim that it never happens to them) there are literally hundreds of them in this book - I counted 12 in three paragraphs at one point (p 40-1). Cabinet prints are presented as the same thing as *cartes de visite*, which they are not (p 9); Spencer was taught by Huxley, which he was not (p 142); the Aboriginal group captured and made to perform by Cunningham were from Western Australia (they were from Queensland) (p 48); the earliest representations of non-European peoples were produced by anthropologists or travellers to the Near or Far East, which they were not (p 38); the Lamprey system was published in the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (actually it was the Journal of the Ethnological Society in 1868, it was not 'Institute' until 1871 or 'Royal' until 1907) (p 41); the Huxley and Lamprey anthropometric systems are confused (p 43, 49). Maybe it is sloppy editing, but then one wonders how anyone could work with the sources cited and get it so wrong. Factual errors of such proportions are not merely an antiquarian concern. They add up to an undermining of the empirical base and suggest a misunderstanding of the

fluid contexts in which photographs and representations such as these operated. The implications of such a level of inaccuracy and unreliability resonate throughout Maxwell's argument, spreading out into other aspects of the book and revealing a lack of understanding of the very processes on which her argument is based.

While the volume contains some interesting material, such as the discussion of the influences on Thomas Andrew the Apia photographer and the discussion of Walter's refusal to sell his photographs singly, it would have been interesting to extend this in relation to Deborah Poole's model of visual economy. But this brings me to another problem: key and classic texts which could have made significant contribution to Maxwell's argument, for example the works of Fabian (1983), Tagg (1988) and Poole (1997) are significant in their absence.

While this volume might have a use for a specialist reader able to pick their way through the minefield of chronic inaccuracies, generalisation, reductionism and overdeterminism, it cannot be recommended for student use; the balance between overview and the many bad habits to be picked up is too weighted toward the latter.

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The cultivation of whiteness: science, health and racial destiny in Australia, by Warwick Anderson, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2002, xi, 352 pp. ISBN 052284989X (pbk), \$34.95 pbk.

In 1937 men of science gathered in Paris and Canberra to consider a set of related issues. The congress in Paris was a joint initiative of the French Group for the Study and Information of Race and Racism, a Paris-based group organised to fight Nazi race science, and the International Population Congress, the general assembly of the International Union for the Scientific Investigation of Population Problems. While the major concern of this meeting was the danger of a declining European population, one section of the Congress - Biometry, Biotypology and Heredity - dealt with issues of race and was dominated by German academics. Despite being so contained and regardless of the presence of such hardened academic race science debunkers as Franz Boas, the German delegates went unsilenced and scientific resistance to the Nazi race science project continued its largely ineffectual course.

Far away but in the same year, in Canberra the Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities brought together many of Australia's 'experts' in native affairs, including the doctor Cecil Cook and the bureaucrat AO Neville. In contrast to

the absence of outcomes in Paris, the meeting in Canberra was consequential, despite the fact that within a short space of time many of the players, including Cook and Neville, had left the field. While the ideas of racial absorption that they had advocated were subsequently enacted through assimilation policy, the positions that they articulated at the meeting drew criticism (for instance from AP Elkin and WEH Stanner) that signalled a fundamental shift in scientific, and later political, opinion.

Warwick Anderson closes his 'book about medical and scientific visions of what it meant to be white in Australia during a period in which the colonial settler society came to refashion itself as a nation' with these developments and shifts in Australia.

Anderson, an Australian medical graduate and historian of science at the Universities of Melbourne and California at San Francisco and Berkeley, sets out to answer the question: 'How did science and medicine more generally give expression to concerns about racial displacement and territorial possession? In explaining health and disease in the new land, how did doctors frame ideas of race and country?' He seeks to do so through the study of the 'mid-level mundane theorising that commonly occurs when one does science or practices medicine in a settler society a long way from Europe'.

Anderson's theorising is neither mid-level nor mundane. He has addressed issues of considerable historical importance which have continuing ramifications and parallels. This work alerts us to the complex space that health theories and theorising occupies in relation to race in Australia (as it has elsewhere), the potency in this regard of medical opinion, and the confusion of that opinion with fact. That this space remains complex in relation to Indigenous Australians should be clear. Witness the medicalised government response to the HREOC *Bringing them home* report, which focused on addressing consequential harm (grief and loss) rather than the underlying breach of human rights (which would, as the Wilson report recommended, require restitution and compensation – substantially more divisive and politically loaded). Ironically, the Commonwealth is thus in the odd situation of funding counselors to address the acknowledged mental health consequences of past policy while vigorously resisting personal or group claims on the basis of harm so caused.

Indeed, *The cultivation of whiteness* is very much about such tensions and inconsistencies and the way in which paradigms have changed, not because of their manifest scientific inadequacy but in response to changing bureaucratic needs. This is not unique to Australia and the reader might consult Saul Dubow's *Scientific racism in modern South Africa*, and Elazar Barkan's *The retreat of scientific racism* to see parallels from another society and the wider international race science context (including how events in Australia contributed, such as the Cambridge expedition to the Torres Strait).

Anderson's book is not, however, solely about these issues in relation to Indigenous Australians, although they are its beginning and end and a constant presence throughout. It is as much about non-Indigenous needs – to 'understand' themselves in places and roles (and 'scientifically' rationalise such understandings) on a colonial stage shared by others whose co-presence challenged cherished beliefs and principles that had theretofore expedited the appropriation of land, labour or whatever else was deemed necessary to imperial or national interest. Medical professionals, many of whom considered themselves, as such, experts on human nature and native peoples, rose to the occasion. Their discipline 'provided a vocabulary for talking about a terri-

tory, and a means of taking imaginative possession of it; later still, it created a syntax for social citizenship, and a means of living up to it'. This territory, and the vocabulary to describe it, was constantly changing in response to conflicting agendas and competing priorities. In laying out these complexities Anderson has condensed broad swathes of theory, practice and policy into a coherent and informative narrative.

The book is divided into three sections – the temperate south, the northern tropics, and Aboriginal Australia – which explore, respectively, early European accommodation with an alien environment in southern Australia, enabling the European exploitation of northern Australia, and the ill-fated marriage of convenience between medicine and anthropology in the service of the state in central Australia through the first half of the twentieth century.

In the first of these sections Anderson describes the imposition of British understandings of the relationship between place and health on a new land and its inhabitants, their preconceptions confirmed by hardship and ill health, which seemed to give way only as the land itself was altered to conform to a European ideal. In chapter two Anderson describes a shift from Europeans' preoccupation with environment to concerns with germ theory, vulnerability, and thus with inheritance. Allied developments in understanding evolution introduced concepts of adaptationism and thus of degeneration with associated social/moral implications.

The second section (the northern tropics), which deals primarily with Queensland (and to a lesser extent the Northern Territory), begins with policy regulating the role of alien labour in the north around the turn of the century, just as concerns about disease emanating from a hostile environment shifted to preoccupation with contagion and the threat of it from aliens, particularly Chinese. Against a background of political and medical debates regarding the possibility of white labour sustaining economic development in the tropics, research shifted focus to consider susceptibility on the basis of contact with hidden reservoirs of infection. Systematic research, relatively well-supported by invested State and Commonwealth governments, eventually dismissed persistent theories of physiological differences between Europeans and native populations, attention moving to the mental fitness of Europeans to tropical climes. This led to a more pragmatic approach to living in the tropics – tropical hygiene (including mass screening and treatment for hookworm) – but also to a reduction in government support with the research locus moving south with shifting priorities. This occurred concurrently with increased interest in eugenics and the urban poor through the 1920s and 1930s, significantly influenced by developments in Europe and the United States where the impact of the Depression had been far greater. Regardless, even in Australia, where 'the nation had to do its best with whatever white material it had, wherever it was found' these ideas took hold as 'medical scientists and geographers ... managed to translate the complex and uncertain political problem of the settling of Australia into a technical idiom'.

The last section (Aboriginal Australia) describes the feeding frenzy of anthropometric and physiological research based out of Adelaide (and, to a lesser extent, Sydney) through the early part of the 20th century. This is the most interesting part of the book and demonstrates the plasticity of theory in responding to research findings and political imperatives. It also emphasises that while very different policy

approaches were sometimes advocated by academic 'experts', overall their policy influence was considerable. This period saw a shift from preoccupation with heredity to considerations of adaptation: 'No longer consigned to the primordial, the "primitive" had come to signify a people who were structurally and functionally adapted to the land, a people who had become part of the land, not alienated from it'. However, 'in thus entering the biomedical present, the "primitive" was given a mediated voice in modernity, and at the same time, white modernity was offering an opportunity to absorb it'. The final chapter of this section surveys the rapidly shifting research terrain in the years before the 1937 Canberra meeting with the increasing emphasis given to genealogy, genetics and breeding giving way to social anthropological research as the project of identifying defining elements of race collapsed: '[w]hiteness was fragmenting, both within the urban fortresses and out on the reproductive frontier ... Scientists began to scoff at fictions of racial and cultural purity or homogeneity, and they predicted that biologically and socially Australia would come to take on a more variegated whiteness, if it remained white at all'.

Anderson concludes by alerting the reader that while 'race science may not inform research and practice in the clinic and the laboratory ... it remains the partly hidden bedrock underlying much public debate'. As anyone attuned to public opinion and political opportunism in contemporary Australia would be aware, he is surely correct.

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Bitin' Back, by Vivienne Cleven, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 2001, pp94, ISBN: 0702232491, \$19.95 pbk.

Vivienne Cleven's *Bitin' Back*, winner of the 2000 David Unaipon Award, represents a fascinating and engaging attempt to challenge readers to redraw the boundaries of Aboriginal writing, and even of the field of literature, more broadly. Its narrator and central character is a middle-aged Aboriginal woman living in a small outback town. No one could seem less 'literary' than the working class Mavis Dooley in her crude ordinariness. Her very language, in its colloquial coarseness and conventionality, its

severely restricted diction and syntactical range, insists upon the point, although it is one of the glories of this unobtrusively ground-breaking novel that the narratorial voice can be strikingly witty and creative within its circumscribed rhetorical limits. In almost all forms of fiction she or someone like her usually features only on the fringes of the main narrative, if at all. Moreover, it is made absolutely clear that she herself doesn't have a clue what 'literature' is, in any sense of the term. And yet, Mavis's teenage, football-playing son has decided to rename himself 'Jean Rhys' after one of the most critically-admired novelists of the 20th century, and may have the makings of a brilliant writer. The masquerade carried on by Mavis's son Nevil, in conjunction with the narrative prominence accorded his very unliterary mother, is a sly signal that the novel is intent upon some mischievous jostling of standard notions of what constitutes a proper work of literature.

Nevil's literary masquerade is also a gender masquerade, and it is this aspect of his effort to reinvent himself that most disturbs his mother, whose notions of gender identity are those that might be expected of someone whose mental categories have been shaped by the mores and prejudices of a small, isolated outback community. Mavis, while literate and no one's fool, is neither highly educated nor politically aware, and she has extremely conventional views about social roles and interactions. She thinks primarily about herself and her immediate experience, rather than social or philosophical issues. The underlying orientation of that thinking is fundamentally essentialist, for she ascribes basic ineradicable qualities to people on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, and race. In short, her own status as an Aboriginal and a woman notwithstanding, her presuppositions about individuals are fraught with the familiar biased thinking of much of mainstream Australia. It doesn't seem inconceivable that she would vote for the Howard government.

Indeed, one of the aspects of this novel that comes as a bit of a surprise is that, on a superficial level at least, it doesn't seem concerned to protest the oppression of Indigenous Australians. Mudrooroo and Adam Shoemaker, authors of the only two book-length studies of Aboriginal writing currently extant, both emphasise the degree to which the literature is of necessity highly imbued with social concern. Indigenous Australians have been and continue to be such a marginalised social group, the argument goes, that it is inevitable and right that issues of race will be prominent in any Aboriginal text. Yet here is a novel by an Indigenous writer which seems more concerned with gender politics than with racism. Its Aboriginal narrator, while aware, of course, of the black/white division in Australian social experience, doesn't seem interested in activist Aboriginal politics. That impression is enforced quietly at one point when Mavis, watching television coverage of a Land Rights march, remains unmoved, her mind on other things. In this respect *Bitin' Back* constitutes an important, remarkable contribution to contemporary Aboriginal writing. One of the beliefs held by many Europeans about non-whites who inhabit predominantly white societies is that the latter must constantly have racial matters at the forefront of their minds. Toni Morrison, the great African-American novelist, was reputedly once asked by an interviewer why the black characters in one of her novels seem unconcerned about issues of race, and her icy response was 'We *do* think about other things, you know.' Mudrooroo and Shoemaker notwithstanding, it may be that the contention that an Aboriginal text must focus significantly upon the politics of Aboriginality is a corollary of the assumption that dark-

skinned people think about little else. The very conception of the character of Mavis implicitly argues otherwise.

It is significant, in the latter respect, that Mavis doesn't even appear to feel intimidated by whites. In her heated confrontations with her rival Dotty, who is white, she displays no anxiety whatever about defying a member of the dominant racial group. Dotty does call Mavis a 'black gin' at one point, and the latter reports this in her characteristically dispassionate manner by observing that Dotty's words 'squealed outta her pinkish face.' But while that exchange is hardly conducted in terms conducive to white-Aboriginal reconciliation, it occurs only after much else has passed between the two with no hint of racial enmity. It seems they just don't like each other. And in the fictional town of Mandamooka generally, even when there are hard feelings between a black person and a white, there is little evidence of racial edginess. Indeed, if one knew nothing whatever about rural Australia other than what can be inferred from this novel, the degree to which black people have been persecuted since the beginning of the European takeover would not be apparent.

Yet the point is not that *Bitin' Back* does not address the issue of racist bigotry and its unsavory social effects, for it does – indirectly. It is a text that is concerned to break down preconceptions of *all* kinds about *diverse* social groups. In renaming himself 'Jean Rhys' and dressing and acting the part, Nevil threatens to undermine essentialist thinking about sexual identity, and more broadly still, about all group identities including those that are racially-based; it is certainly significant in this regard that the identity he has adopted is that of a white writer. And for Mavis there is something equally unsettling: he seems to be a different *person*, not her familiar Nevil. Ill-prepared for such a thought, she is forcibly introduced to the speculation that for any individual another self is distinctly realisable, just as it is always possible to trade in football pants for a dress. Identity is a matter of conning those with whom one comes into contact regularly – and, in the process, oneself. Late in the narrative, at a moment when all hell is about to break loose – a neighbor has entered the house wearing the clothes of her dead husband and carrying his shotgun, and the police are pounding at the door – Mavis says to herself 'Could a woman be maginatin all a this [sic]?' That, really, is the question that has been haunting her from the start. For the 'all a this' that has been rendered fantastic yet conceivable is everything Mavis had previously assumed was fundamentally one certain, knowable way and none other – every social or racial or gender role, and every individual personality, including her own. At the moment she puts that question to herself, the shotgun actually goes off – the text's way of signaling the final shattering of Mavis's essentialist certitude. She goes on to think, significantly, 'Show's over. That's all she wrote.'

But the traumatic shattering of previously unassailable modes of understanding self and society heralds a comically happy ending in which what went wrong is put right, mostly. Nevil does return to the body briefly sublet to 'Jean Rhys'; a football match and associated punch-up goes well for Mavis and her mob; and Mavis even scores the male love interest she had consigned to her arch-rival. Most importantly, Nevil, as it turns out, is not gay and not a transvestite in his heart: he has only been attempting to experience life as a woman for sake of his writing, because his first novel will feature a female protagonist. Yet Nevil's reversion to maleness does not signify a return to the status quo so cherished by the essentialist imagination. Disturbingly, he

has established himself as a male, and an Aboriginal, who literally doesn't know his place. Worse, he isn't even trying to lay claim to a place that isn't his designated one. In transgressing socially sacrosanct gender boundaries, he signals his willingness to invade any and all places, to assume, at least in imagination, disparate roles and diverse identities – including, possibly, some that are as yet unimagined.

The novel's gist, I think, is that it is to the extent that we can perform an analogous mental exercise that we may be enabled to think past the stereotypes that so much in modern society does its utmost to impose upon us. For one of the implications that *Bitin' Back* seems to convey concerns the value of literature, particularly narrative, as a means of doing what Nevil says the protagonist of his first novel does: bucking stereotypes. In this regard Cleven's text echoes an old, hopeful argument on behalf of the redeeming social value of literary discourse, one that maintains that the development of the power of imaginative projection into other lives, other beings, enhances one's capacity to comprehend and sympathise with those who might otherwise remain strange, alien, inferior, or even despicable. Radically altering the outward signs of one's gender is one way to step into the mind of someone unlike oneself. Another, less taxing and more common, is to identify with a character in a story. In many instances imaginative identification isn't much of a stretch; if a character resembles a reader in many ways and inhabits a social milieu much like his or her own, the world isn't being refracted through eyes that see very differently. But the majority of *Bitin' Back's* readers will probably be, in varying degrees, quite unlike the grandly unliterary Mavis, and may therefore have to stretch their imaginations rather expansively. For most of us, to read this novel is to engage, like Nevil, in a bit of cross-dressing – and perhaps to imagine, like Mavis, that some strange Jean Rhys has unexpectedly become kindred.

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We won the victory: Aborigines and outsiders on the north-west coast of the Kimberley, by Ian Crawford, pp 335, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2001, \$24.95.

Ian Crawford's *We won the victory* is an exploration of contact history between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people (Indonesian fishermen, explorers, pastoralists, missionaries, beachcombers and the Army) in the region of the Kimberleys mainly between Camden Harbour in the west and Cape Londonderry in the east. To a lesser extent, Crawford also refers to country and peoples west and east of this region, and to the missions, settlements or contemporary communities located in these areas. This work largely centers on Worora, Wunambal, Gambera and Gwini peoples (p 34). Wunambal, Gambera, Walambi and Gwini people congregated at the Benedictine mission of Drysdale River (Pago) in the east (now the community of Kalumburu not too distant from the Pago mission site) (p 35). Wunambal peoples were also drawn to the Presbyterian Kunmunya mission (which was subsequently re-established at Wotjulum, later as 'old Mowanjum' and lastly as 'new Mowanjum' community ten kilometers outside of Derby), along with Worora and Ngarinyin peoples (p 33).

Crawford begins with Aboriginal narratives and accounts, and to these adds layers of archaeological knowledge and his own experiences with the people who are relaying these accounts to him. Crawford juxtaposes these against non-Indigenous documentary sources, and this provides a powerful illumination of the differences in perspectives between Aboriginal people and outsiders concerning the same events, and the subsequent misunderstandings (and worse) that arose and continue to arise, in part, through such differences (see for example p 182). It is Crawford's view that 'the difficulties faced by Aboriginal people in the far north-west of the Kimberley during the past hundred years of white contact have been enormous, but their account is not a history of defeat' (p 15). This theme encapsulates the overall work, the ways in which the Aboriginal people Crawford deals with have 'retained control of their lives to a degree not paralleled in other parts of Western Australia' (p 22). This is despite contact with successive groups of outsiders and with regimes of invasion, missionisation, government legislation, and indeed land appropriation.

We won the victory begins with Crawford's description of his journey back to Kalumburu, which he uses to introduce something of the history of the region as well as some Aboriginal interpretations of the landscape and Aboriginal cultural institutions. This is followed by a focus on contemporary Kalumburu and the former Pago mission. He then discusses Indonesian contact with local Aboriginal people, the explorers of the region, and Aboriginal narratives of these exploratory expeditions. He continues with the early settlement at Camden Harbour, the impact of the pearlers in this region, and pastoral settlement. In chapter ten Crawford introduces further detailed material about Kunmunya mission and its transformation to Wotjulum and eventually Mowanjum. Here Crawford describes some of the important differences between Kalumburu and Mowanjum (p191) and the impacts the different mission regimes had and have for the ways Aboriginal people from these missions have approached Christianity and contemporary decision-making. Crawford then discusses Willie Reid, an Aboriginal man from Queensland, and the settlement he formed at Kinganna to which many local Aboriginal people were drawn and which affected Aboriginal 'views of Western culture and modified their own experiences of traditional life' (p279). This is followed by a discussion of the 'Japanese War' (World War II) and the post-war situation along the coast. There are further reflections on Kinganna via Crawford's description of his journey to Kinganna with four Aboriginal people journeying in 1988. The last two chapters of the book focus on the contemporary, in terms of Aboriginal cultural beliefs, Christian celebrations and contemporary expressions of traditional culture. In the postscript Crawford discusses the contemporary era of Native Title, and the appropriation of Wunambal land via the recent creation of two National Parks over the Mitchell Plateau and Lawley River (p307).

This is a very thoughtful, reflective and sensitively written work which is both scholarly and accessible to a wider audience. Among the things that Crawford achieves without resorting to theoretical arguments about modes of ethnographic writing is to reveal the dialectic nature of fieldwork throughout the book, and this is one of the work's many strengths. Another is Crawford's long term association with the people he writes about, an association that began in the 1960s when he worked with them while researching his doctoral thesis in archaeology, and which continued through a thirty year period of working for the West Australian Museum. The perspective that Craw-

ford can thus bring to bear is one of substantial familiarity and experience and this is evident throughout the work. One of the delights of this book is the interspersing of Aboriginal people's contemporary comments and interactions with their country alongside narratives of the past. This serves to reinforce that the past remains in the present, and reflects the ways that Aboriginal history is embedded within and retrieved from the landscape. This is therefore a book that is at the same time personal and personalised, while remaining a scholarly work and one that provides much room for Aboriginal voices to be heard within it. This book should be of interest to general readers interested in Aboriginal affairs, to readers with specific interests in Aboriginal contact history, and to those with specialist interest in Aboriginal issues and history in the Kimberley region.

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Through silent country, by Carolyn Wadley Dowley, 462 pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000, ISBN: 1 86368 281 3, \$32.50 pbk.

In 1921 a group of Aboriginal people were forcibly removed from Laverton, a small mining town in the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia, and transported over 1000km to a government settlement for Aboriginal people known as Moore River or Mogumber. Other people from the goldfields had already been transported to this settlement, including three young male relatives of the group, with whom they were reunited. A few weeks later this group successfully escaped, and, after splitting into three parties, all but one trekked safely, by different routes, across country to Laverton.

While searching for a thesis topic in 1996, Carolyn Wadley Dowley came across an account of this event in Bill Bunbury's *Reading labels on jam tins: living through difficult times*. Greatly moved by this account of an extraordinary feat of courage, endurance and defiance, she was convinced that more information about the circumstances of the removal and escape could be salvaged from government records and the oral histories of the people connected to the escapees. Locating and accessing such additional information became a major focus of her research. As her search broadened, Dowley found other published accounts or mentions of the escape: a letter by the Aboriginal activist William Harris published in a 1926 *Western Australian* newspaper, and histories written by Margaret Morgan (1986), and Anna Haebich (1988). She also located a body of documents and oral history recordings about the incident, and was able to consult with Margaret Morgan and Bill Bunbury, who had undertaken their own research of the event. Dowley's own attempts to access documents and to record additional Aboriginal history of this event introduced her to the rich but as yet poorly recorded history held by the Aboriginal people of the Eastern Goldfields.

The results and the route of her investigative adventure into the historical records and Western Australia's Eastern Goldfields Aboriginal society form the substance of *Through silent country*. The book is about the construction of history as much as it is about an account of this particular event. It is organised into four main sections, entitled

'Journeying', 'Speakings', 'Writings', and 'A New Account', supplemented with eleven appendices.

The first section, 'Journeying', consists of selected passages from the author's journal entries of 'impulsively written thoughts and impressions arising from encountering people and places' (p15) made during two field trips to the Eastern Goldfields in 1997. Dowley describes her experiences of travelling from Perth to the Kalgoorlie-Laverton region and her incorporation into a network of Aboriginal people who are connected in some way to the 1921 escapees and who were also once residents of an Aboriginal mission near Laverton, known as Mt Margaret. This section may present problems for readers unfamiliar with the Aboriginal history of the region. For instance, the author introduces persons such as the chief chronicler of Mt Margaret Mission history, Margaret Morgan, and Aboriginal people who become key participants in the research, but provides minimal clues about their identity and significance in the region's history. Only later in the book does the reader obtain an appreciation of the significance of this event in Mt Margaret Mission history. Of interest to researchers is Dowley's account of her sensitive and successful negotiation of approval for her research plans. A jarring note in this section is her reference to another researcher, who, she indicates, was regarded as less successful in this process.

While the 'Journeying' section suggests that chance played a large role in who Dowley met and where she travelled, later in the book the author describes her considerable preparation prior to the first field trip. This entailed background research, interviews with other researchers, and advice from a prominent local Aboriginal woman. Consideration could be given to the inclusion in a future edition of a section named, perhaps, 'Awakening', in which the author describes her initial ignorance of Eastern Goldfields Aboriginal history, her discovery of this event, and her preparatory work to enrich its historical record. Although these matters are revealed in an appendix, the chronology of this research process is lost in the current organisation of the book.

The section named 'Speakings' consists of skillfully edited transcriptions of tape-recorded oral accounts which were 'deliberately constructed by the speakers for this book' (p71). They provide readers with glimpses of the history of a segment of the Eastern Goldfields' population, namely those who spent a significant proportion of their lives at Mt Margaret Mission. The accounts describe the Speakers' sense of loss of history about the 1921 event, while at the same time contain their own experiences of deception, entrapment, powerlessness, incarceration and escape. Memorable among these narratives are the contributions of Mr Ranji McIntyre and Mrs Rose Meredith, who both made their own separate journeys from the southwest back to the Eastern Goldfields region, and the experiences of others of evading removal from the region through taking sanctuary at Mt Margaret Mission. Some explanation of the order of the 'Speakings' is needed. If it derives from considerations of gender, status, genealogical links to the escapees and knowledge of the event, this is not clear.

The third section of the book, 'Writings', contains the documentary material accessed during the research and describes Dowley's experiences of locating and obtaining these records - 'not straightforward nor linear' (p222). Her account of locating potential sources, negotiating their access, writing with the knowledge of the likelihood that there are still 'potentially revelatory archival files' to be accessed will

resonate with experienced researchers and inform novices. Readers will find this section both interesting and informative as it includes copies of written records. Too often, such materials are merely listed in the reference section, depriving the reader of the richness of the historical records. The author distinguishes the contemporaneous from the more distant and probably more interpretative accounts; and between the recorders, according to whether they are of Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal ancestry; and according to their relationship and roles with respect to the people involved in the 1921 event. There is only one contemporaneous Aboriginal written source: a letter by the Aboriginal activist, and founder of the Native Union of Western Australia, William Harris, published in a 1926 newspaper. Non-Aboriginal sources include police reports, the letters and diary of the Mt Margaret missionary (who is also the father of Margaret Morgan) and Moore River Settlement records. Included in the 'Writings' section is a sub-section termed 'Absences in contemporary writings' in which the author notes the lack of information about the 1921 event in sources where some mention could have been expected, such as Pamela Rajkowski's *Linden girl*.

'Writings' also contains summaries and extracts of oral history recorded by others before Dowley's own research. She mentions Bill Bunbury's 1986 interviews with Reggie Johnson, in which Johnson says he learnt about the incident from his father and with Margaret Morgan (whose father gave succour to the escapees). Dowley also refers to Margaret Morgan's own recording of oral history about the event that was not available for inclusion in this publication. These 'Writings' are quite different from the other 'Writings' and seem to be misplaced in this section. To recognise and preserve their difference, in a future edition, perhaps they could be distinguished as 'Previous or First Speakings'.

In the fourth section, 'A New Account', the author presents her own construction of the history of this event, using materials from the 'Speakings' and 'Writings' sections. The borrowed materials are clearly identified, so that the reader can locate them in these previous sections. Dowley's intentions here are several, including to demonstrate how 'this account also mirrors the experience of many other people' (p319), to honour her informants and show 'the continuation of the past in the present' (p318), and to show how she developed her interpretation of the history of this event.

In choosing to present her 'New Account' as a narrative rather than omniscient form, Dowley considers that she has overcome some difficulties in dealing with constructing a history about a cross-cultural event, and from incomplete and diverse materials. Dowley regards her account as interpretative rather than definitive. Firstly, because not all the facts about the 1921 incident are known, she needed to adopt an approach that could accommodate moving 'beyond the formal rules of evidence for historical writing' (p320). Secondly, fearing that her 'necessarily limited knowledge of Wongutha culture' could adversely affect her writing about the event, she had the New Account reviewed and approved by a 'Wongutha woman of high community regard' (p320). Dowley also had qualms about whether or not she had the 'right' or rightness to write about an event that she considers belonged to other people. The approval and support of her Speakers reassured her and helped her to decide that she could not 'contribute to the silence by keeping this story, this history concealed' (p321). However, as her own research shows, the history of her Aboriginal informants has not been concealed. Rather, it has been mostly ignored, incompletely transmitted, devalued and,

perhaps, deliberately suppressed. The present book points to the urgent need for the preservation of this history; *Through silent country* may inspire Aboriginal people to write their own Accounts.

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A terribly wild man: a biography of the Rev Ernest Gribble, by Christine Halse, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2002, 220pp, \$35.00, ISBN 186508753X (pbk).

A biography of the Reverend Ernest Gribble, the extraordinary and controversial missionary, is long overdue. Christine Halse's book grew out of her research for a PhD thesis, a task that took her to Yarrabah in far north Queensland and Forrest River Mission, now Oombulgurri, in the east Kimberley to interview people who knew Gribble. However, *A terribly wild man* is important for reasons other than biography.

The book traces the life of Ernest Gribble from his boyhood at Jerilderie in the time when the Kelly gang held up the town to his death at Yarrabah mission in north Queensland in 1957. He went to school at Warangesda mission in New South Wales and was with his father at a failed mission in the Gascoyne in 1885. His name is associated with missions at Yarrabah, Mitchell River and Palm Island in Queensland, Roper River in the Northern Territory and Forrest River. In 1922 Gribble reported Aboriginal accounts of murders at the Durack River and in 1926 he reported more killings, this time at the nearby Forrest River. Halse accepts in her book that these killings occurred.

In 1999, Rod Moran, a Perth journalist and book review editor for the *West Australian*, wrote *Massacre myth*, in which he rejected claims that any Aboriginal people were killed at either the Durack River or Forrest River. Since then both he and Dr Keith Windshuttle have been outspoken critics of certain Aboriginal statements about frontier murders. Moran, in *Quadrant* (Jan 2002), described such accounts as 'stories my mum and dad told me'.

Halse is one of three authors whose recent books incorporate Aboriginal recollections of violent encounters in the Kimberley. The others are anthropologist Ian Crawford and historian Mary Anne Jebb, who each spent many years working closely with Kimberley Aboriginal people to record the hidden side of history. In January, Crawford's book, *We won the victory*, was given poor reviews in the *West Australian* by Antonia Cavezzi and by Rod Moran in *Quadrant* in the same month. The reviewers' pri-

mary objection was the use of Aboriginal evidence in reference to the Forrest River massacre.

Halse's account of the Durack River murders is through the words of Clara Roberts, who said that she was a witness. Moran, in his review of *A terribly wild man* in the *West Australian*³ pointed out some errors of fact and took Halse to task for accepting the recollections of an Aboriginal woman who was said to be six years old in 1922. Clara Wanuarie legally married Herbert Omar in 1922 and was at least sixteen, not six, when she witnessed the murders; old enough to remember the detail and corroborate the rumours. She married Robert Unjamurra Roberts some ten years after Herbert's death. Moran also claimed that Bishop Trower, 'assisted by' Police Inspector Spedding-Smith, conducted an investigation at the mission and established that the rumours were false. And this investigation is said to prove Halse wrong? Apart from the incongruous 'Father Brown' notion that a police inspector would assist a bishop in a murder investigation, the facts – while not proving Roberts and Halse are correct – do not prove they are wrong. In a letter of 23 July 1922 Gribble informed the Chief Protector, Mr Neville, that a group of Aboriginal people reported that police assistants shot a number of people at the Durack River. As the bishop was expected elsewhere, he could not spare the time to investigate the rumours.

Spedding Smith 'hitched' a ride with the bishop to interview those who made the original complaint, but they had already left the mission. He never visited the alleged murder site and reported to the Commissioner of Police that all he heard was hearsay and bush gossip. Bishop Trower, who was on a one-day inspection of the mission, did not investigate the matter and apparently accepted the inspector's findings. The police assistants admitted to shots being fired 'in self defence' but denied the murders.

This case was raised again at the Royal Commission inquiring into the Forrest River allegations when Mr Neville was quizzed. It was put to him that Bishop Trower made a report, but Neville did not confirm this and none has been seen. Neville stated that an inquiry (by Spedding-Smith) showed that shooting had occurred at the Durack, but found no proof of murder.

Jebb, in *Blood sweat and welfare*, accepted statements by Ngarinyin elders that Aborigines were shot at the Durack River in 1922. Howard Willis, in reviewing the book for the *West Australian*,⁴ echoed Moran's sentiments and referred her to the Royal Commission report claiming this proved the murder rumours to be false, which however it did not.

Even though the 1922 and 1926 allegations of murders could not be proven, the memories of violent encounters have endured amongst Kimberley Aboriginal people and should not be dismissed merely as 'stories my mum and dad told me'. In *A terribly wild man* Halse challenges the massacre myth version of frontier history endorsed by those who want a return to the 'happy picaninny' stories of sixty years ago.

³ *West Australian*, 29th June 2002

⁴ *West Australian* 24th August 2002

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Dr Neville Green

author of *The Forrest River massacres and government teacher at Forrest River Mission, 1967*.