ABORIGINAL HISTORY
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Preface
Ben Silverstein and Crystal McKinnon

They saw smoke, they saw fires on the mainland. We were here. We’ve always been here.

— Norelle Watson, Gooreng Gooreng

Before we knew how COVID-19 would transform the ways we live and relate to one another or how people around the world would rise together in outrage over police brutality, violence and racism under the Black Lives Matter movement, it seemed that 2020 would be marked by commemoration of the 250th anniversary of James Cook’s arrival in Australia. It would be a year of ceremonies and festivals, new statues and new books, of public history in multiple guises. We were even promised a ‘re-enactment’ of the Endeavour’s circumnavigation of Australia, pushing this history further and further into the mythic realm.

What remained, once our lives were confined by the pandemic, were a series of exhibitions moved online but also still staged in public institutions. These re-narrate what has been described as ‘one of the nation’s origin stories’ by embracing, rather than seeking to resolve, the contestation that attends memories and histories of 1770.

In Endeavour Voyage: The Untold Stories of Cook and the First Australians, for instance, the National Museum of Australia (NMA) offered us a view from the shore, representing seven locations along the east coast to try to tell more fully a national story of what happened in 1770. The State Library of New South Wales exhibition Eight Days in Kamay, by contrast, was more locally focused, taking us into the eight days the crew of the Endeavour spent in what is now Sydney.

Perhaps it was the circumstance of 2020, and the memory of the catastrophic bushfires of the previous summer, but I (Ben) was drawn to the part of the Eight Days in Kamay exhibition that emphasised sailors’ visions of smoke. Smoke was

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a frequent referent, a preoccupation of those on board the *Endeavour* not least as they observed the shore at or near Kamay. On 21 April 1770, Cook wrote in his journal that: ‘In the PM we saw the smook of fire in several places a certain sign that the Country is inhabited’. Joseph Banks commented on fire and smoke most days as they travelled along the coast, and on 28 April described a ‘small smoak arising from a very barren place directed our glasses that way and we soon saw about 10 people, who on our approach left the fire and retired to a little eminence where they could conveniently see the ship’. For both these observers, fire was associated with people.

But Monero/Yuin Elder Aileen Blackburn reminds us that:

Smoke was more than proof that the land was inhabited. We used dularn [fire] and doombook [smoke] to warn of a bad omen that was repeated from point to point along the coast. It was our responsibility to send the message on, light the fires, and make sure everyone was well-informed.

The smoke was communication, as those on the shore observed the ship on the sea and shared knowledge with their neighbours. As the *Endeavour* travelled north along the east coast of Australia, Gweagal knowledge holder Shayne Williams tells us, Cook:

noticed that there was columns of smoke all the way along the coastline. We call them [bundameri], smoke. And even Banks, who I think wrote in his own journal that it seems they were being tracked or followed and, in fact, that’s what we was doing, we was actually tracking them all the way along the coastline …

People from the south would bring in these message sticks as well. As well as smoke signals there was message sticks being brought all along the coast as well. Or letter sticks, as my great uncle says, describes it, and to warn people that they was on their way.

We see this too in Alison Page’s beautifully evocative film *The Message*, a collaborative production that screened as part of the NMA exhibition. These representations position that fire as evidence of connection and communication, but also of discovery: Aboriginal people saw Cook before he saw them. Claims to priority are contested.

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4 Quoted in ‘Ship and Shore: Navigating the Exhibition’, 63.
We want to dwell briefly on the meaning of fire and smoke and the different senses in which that smoke was understood. The men of the *Endeavour* observed fire from the shores too; on his third day at Kamay, Banks noted that just after sunrise some Aboriginal people lit fires in the woods, describing with some uncertainty what may have been an attempt to ‘harass the strangers into leaving’. But, for Banks, the nature of the fires he saw usually spoke to the nature of the people who produced them. On 22 April 1770, he had written that he had not observed ‘those large fires’ made ‘in order to clear the ground for cultivation; we thence concluded not much in favour of our future friends’. The apparent absence of those fires connoted, to Banks, the absence of land management, the lack of agriculture and a marker of primitivity.

But these observations speak more to Banks’s failure or incapacity to communicate and elicit knowledge than they reveal the nature of Aboriginal uses of fire. For we know that Aboriginal people used and, in many cases, continue to use fire deliberately across Country. Some of this was fire as communication, as those on board the *Endeavour* witnessed in 1770. But other fires would presumably have been instances of what is now often described as ‘cultural burning’: a tool of a broader land management practice. In this sense, as Victor Steffenson tells us, burning involves practising Indigenous knowledge systems. Lighting fires requires knowing how to read the Country, identifying what needs to burn and how. And that burning, then, is the application of Aboriginal fire knowledge to the landscape to ‘maintain the health of animals and plants’. Fire keeps Country healthy.

Those on board the *Endeavour* were unable or unwilling to see the fires they observed as evidence of that land management, keeping Country healthy and ensuring a nurturing, rather than hostile, landscape. This is an ideological correlate of the presumption of terra nullius, believing in an unmanaged as well as an unowned or non-sovereign country. For this reason, among many others, perhaps it is time to move on from Cook, to find new stories. Starting with the *Endeavour* can lead us to historical questions like that implicit in Banks’s judgement: do Aboriginal people practise agriculture? We might rather ask how Indigenous knowledges and sovereignties may contribute to the health of Country and people, how they might lick at the edges of colonising thinking and, perhaps, drive it out.

Elsewhere, the history of Cook’s arrival might be a spur for new ways of remembering and relating to one another. Charlotte Ward’s article in this volume addresses this problem. In examining re-enactments of Cook’s landing in Cooktown, this article

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7 Nugent, *Captain Cook Was Here*, 62, 65.
10 Steffensen, *Fire Country*, 20, 92, 97.
traces the way local processes of engaging with history have produced a kind of truth-telling that narrates both the episodes that followed Cook’s landing in 1770 and the much longer history of Guugu Yimithirr sovereignty. Through long and difficult practices of engagement, Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of Cooktown have produced something of a shared history of Cook(town), a very local instance of reconciliation that speaks in fraught ways to the national stage. The next article remains in Queensland, examining fear on the frontier through a study of homes and huts and their fortification. Deploying a multidisciplinary methodology, Heather Burke, Ray Kerkhove, Lynley A. Wallis, Cathy Keys and Bryce Barker assess the extent to which domestic architecture of the frontier included fortified features, manifesting high levels of settler anxiety. They historicise representations of these fortifications, tying these to changing national historical sensibilities and thus mapping a dialogic frontier historicity that can be read through multiple sources.

The volume then includes three fascinating articles exploring intersections between history-making, cultural production, and Aboriginal agency. In a collaborative article, Myfany Turpin, Felicity Meakins, Marie Mudgedell, Angie Tchooga and Calista Yeoh consider three performances of ‘Puranguwana’, a ‘classical’ Western Desert song that emerges from the death of Yawalyurru, a Pintupi man. Through renditions of the song, contemporary singers experience once more the tragedy of his death, performing a historicity in which remembrance and experience are intertwined. Paige Gleeson provides a biography of an image, that of Warlpiri-Annmatyerr man Gwoja Tjungurrayi, known since the 1950s as ‘One Pound Jimmy’. This image, used on a postage stamp and on the two dollar coin, has been widely diffused, encapsulating his likeness within Aboriginalia. But his life, which Gleeson evokes in its rich complexity, far exceeded this representation. Gretchen Stolte’s article works at similar intersections of culture and kitsch, re-framing the history of Queensland Aboriginal Creations – a body launched in 1959 by the Queensland Department of Native Affairs in order to facilitate the mass production of artefacts for tourist consumption – through the prism of agency and legacy. In so doing, she emphasises these boomerangs as works of cultural importance, dispelling presumptions of the ‘taint of tourism’ to blur concepts of authenticity, the market, commodity production and agency in ways that enrich our understanding of Aboriginal artwork and its production.

We end this preface with a few words about Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter is not just a moment in 2020, it is a movement. Here in Australia, this movement is best understood as a part of a long history of Aboriginal resistance to police brutality and white supremacy. Though Aboriginal people and communities have long fought for justice for deaths in custody and freedom from systemic violence, little has changed. The year 2021 marks 30 years since the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report was delivered, and the majority of its
recommendations are still yet to be implemented.¹¹ There have been more than 441 Aboriginal deaths since this royal commission, and no police officer or authority has yet been convicted for any of these Black Deaths in Custody.

The Black Lives Matter movement has brought people together in the fight for justice and to end police brutality. This movement has changed the way that we talk about policing and prisons in Australia and around the world. Now we need to turn that talk into action.

As academics, as historians, who write and research about Aboriginal history, we have a responsibility to take action to support the fights for justice for Aboriginal people and communities. This is a commitment that we have made and want to reiterate to readers as the editors of Aboriginal History. We stand with the families of those who have died in custody and commit ourselves to fighting with them for justice. The families of the following people are working with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service in a campaign for them all to meet with the Prime Minister this year to talk about justice: Ms Dhu, Aunty Tanya Day, Wayne Morrison, Tane Chatfield, Stanley Inman, Raymond Noel Thomas, Aunty Sherry Fisher-Tilbéroo, Nathan Reynolds, Cherdeen Wynne, Warren John Cooper, David Dungay Jnr, Gareth Jackson Roe, Joyce Clarke, Christopher Drage and Trisjack Simpson. We urge readers of Aboriginal History to take action and support them.¹²

This is our first volume as editors of Aboriginal History. Though it is published in 2021, it was prepared in 2020, a year of disrupted circumstances as we worked through lockdowns, travel bans and institutional restructuring. This volume is produced thanks to the tireless work of the Aboriginal History board, especially including Maria Nugent and the outgoing editor Ingereth Macfarlane, as well as copyeditor Geoff Hunt, and Emily Tinker at ANU Press. We hope it continues a long tradition of interdisciplinary historically minded scholarship, valuing and foregrounding Indigenous knowledge, voices and experiences.

References


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¹¹ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Final Report.


Contributors

**Bryce Barker** is an archaeologist at the University of Southern Queensland. He has worked on historical archaeological sites on the Darling Downs in south-east Queensland, as well as a variety of Indigenous archaeological projects in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Papua New Guinea. For the past four years he has been working on the archaeology of Native Mounted Police sites across Queensland.

**Heather Burke** is a historical archaeologist based at Flinders University. Her most recent projects have been focusing on the archaeology of Indigenous–European conflict in Queensland and South Australia, especially the archaeology of the Queensland Native Mounted Police.

**Paige Gleeson** is a PhD candidate in History at the University of Tasmania, researching the histories of museums, material collection, visual culture and colonial governance in the Australia-Pacific region. Paige was a recipient of the Australian Historical Association Copyright Agency Travel and Writing Bursary in 2020, a National Library of Australia Carol Mills Summer Scholarship in 2019, and winner of the Forty South, Van Diemen’s History Prize in 2018–19.

**Ray Kerkhove** is a historian with the Aboriginal Environments Research Centre at the University of Queensland (Department of Architecture). He was previously (2017–18) a Visiting Fellow at Griffith University’s Harry Gentle Resource Centre. He specialises in the Indigenous site/conflict history and Indigenous material culture of nineteenth-century Queensland.

**Cathy Keys** is a Research Fellow in the School of Architecture, University of Queensland. Her research explores the social, cultural and historical properties of architectural space on northern Australia’s settler frontiers.

**Crystal McKinnon** is a Yamatji woman who lives and works on Kulin Nations country. She is a historian and a critical Indigenous studies scholar, who is currently working at RMIT as a Vice Chancellor’s Indigenous Research Fellow in the Social and Global Studies Centre. McKinnon’s research work has looked at concepts of Indigenous sovereignty, justice and law, and Indigenous social movements, resistance
and protest through the use of the creative arts, including music and literature. She is a member of the Warriors of Aboriginal Resistance (WAR Victoria). Crystal also sits on the steering committee for the Law and Advocacy Centre for Women and has previously worked in both the Aboriginal community organisation and the community legal centre sectors.

**Felicity Meakins** is an ARC Future Fellow in Linguistics at the University of Queensland. She is a field linguist who specialises in the documentation of Australian Indigenous languages in the Victoria River district of the Northern Territory and the effect of English on Indigenous languages. She has worked as a community linguist as well as an academic over the past 19 years, facilitating language revitalisation programs, consulting on native title claims and conducting research into Indigenous languages. She has compiled a number of dictionaries and grammars of traditional Indigenous languages and has written numerous papers on language change in Australia.

**Marie Mudgedell** and **Angie Tchooga** are Kukatja and Jaru speakers who live at Balgo, Western Australia. They are descendants of Yawalyurru, to whom the song titled ‘Puranguwana’ ('Perishing in the Sun') is attributed. Marie assisted with the translation of the songs discussed in Turpin et al. and organised the recording sessions. Angie Tchooga provided the explanation of ‘Puranguwana’ as recorded by the Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media organisation and assisted with the translation.

**Ben Silverstein** is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in History and Lecturer in Indigenous Studies at The Australian National University. He has researched in colonial and Indigenous histories, engaging questions of race and settler colonialism as well as contests over sovereignties and colonial government. He is currently working in the Research Centre for Deep History on Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country.

**Gretchen M. Stolte** is a Nimi’ipuu (Nez Perce) American Indian and has degrees in art history and anthropology focusing on the material culture of First Nations peoples both in North America and Australia. Dr Stolte’s research areas focuses on the relationship between images and identity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists in urban and regional centres in Queensland. Dr Stolte is intrigued by the material culture traditions often overlooked by galleries and museums. She combines ethnographic and art historical methodologies in order to draw out new understandings of artworks and artefacts and the artists and craftspeople who make them.

**Myfany Turpin** is an Associate Professor at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney. She has written a dictionary of the Australian Aboriginal language Kaytetye and documented traditional music of the Kaytetye, Alyawarr,
Anmatyerr, Arrernte, Warlpiri and Gurindji peoples of the Northern Territory, Australia. She has published scholarly articles in music, semantics, phonology and ethnobiology; and has produced multimedia resources on language learning and Aboriginal songs.

**Lynley A. Wallis** is based at Griffith University. She has worked in Indigenous archaeology for the past 20 years, having undertaken archaeological research with Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Great Victorian Desert regions of Western Australia, the Edward Pellew and Wellesley Groups of islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and in arid inland northwest Queensland. She has also worked on historical archaeological sites in South Australia and Tasmania, as well as on the archaeology of the Queensland Native Mounted Police.

**Charlotte Ward** is a historian based in Canberra on Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country. She currently works as a Project Officer at the Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association. She completed her Honours thesis in 2019 at The Australian National University and her article in this issue is drawn from her thesis and her time in Cooktown.

**Calista Yeoh** is an MA student in musicology at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney. Her Honours and Master’s research focuses on the musical structures of central Australian Aboriginal songs. She is the co-author of ‘An Aboriginal Women’s Song from Arrwek, Central Australia’ (*Musicology Australia* 40, no. 2, 2018). Her transcriptions and musical analyses of Aboriginal songs have appeared in numerous publications, in collaboration with communities, linguists and ethnomusicologists.
Articles
Reconciling his history: How revisiting the memory of Cook’s visit facilitated a process of reconciliation within the Cooktown community from 1998 to 2019

Charlotte Ward

Abstract: Reconciliation has been a political concern since the early 1990s. However, on a national level, reconciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians is yet to be realised. In more recent years, the process has moved from a national symbolic movement to a more localised level. This article analyses the processes and performances of reconciliation that have taken place in Cooktown since the early 1990s and have attracted national attention. Specifically, their annual re-enactment of Captain Cook’s visit in 1770 has transformed from a narrative of colonisation to one of reconciliation. This article argues that it is the very local processes of engaging with the history that has made history a useful tool to help facilitate forms of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents in Cooktown. This is most evident in the way the script of Cooktown’s annual re-enactment has been rewritten and the performance expanded and changed as a result. In tracing this and other local history projects, the article reveals the ways in which a linear, yet inclusive, narrative has been created, as well as how new spaces have been prised open for telling new histories. The article concludes by reasserting the strengths of a grassroots approach to reconciling history.
On 11 June 1770, close to midnight, Captain Cook’s infamous *Endeavour* struck what is now known as the Great Barrier Reef, roughly 12 miles from the coastline. Cook and the crew, in a desperate mission to save the ship and their lives, threw heavy objects overboard and tried to plug the hole in the *Endeavour*. Hours later, they managed to ‘fother’ it and navigate a safe passage through the coral reef to the mainland. There they found themselves on the shores of Waalumbaal Birri, which they later named Endeavour River. Cook and his crew stayed there for 48 days, repairing the *Endeavour*, assessing flora and fauna, stocking up on food and documenting their experiences. It was here on the shores of the Endeavour River in 1770 that the crew recorded the Aboriginal language Guugu Yimithirr and adopted the word ‘gangurru’, from which evolved the English word ‘kangaroo’. During their stay, Cook and his crew had multiple exchanges with the Guugu Yimithirr people – some of which have become more historically prominent than others. This is a brief overview of the history that is remembered in the name, Cooktown, given to the settlement that emerged 100 years later.¹

I came across Cooktown in the final semester of my undergraduate degree, during my internship at the National Museum of Australia (NMA). I was working on the 2020 exhibition of Captain Cook’s 1770 voyage along the east coast of Australia. The NMA was one of the national institutions that received funding from the federal government to create an exhibition that represented ‘the perspectives of both non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians about Cook’s voyage and its continuing and contested legacies today … by counterpointing the “view from the ship” with “the view from the shore”’.² The Endeavour 250 curatorial team was representative of these perspectives – made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous curators. My role was to undertake research on the Indigenous languages at the locations Cook observed on his voyage. Given that the *Endeavour* expedition had collected some Guugu Yimithirr vocabulary, it was one of the languages I began to research, which brought me to Cooktown.

Through my work at the NMA, I became aware that there was a long commemorative history of celebrating Cook’s visit in and around Cooktown. The story I first heard was one of apparent reconciliation between Cook and the Guugu Yimithirr people. I was curious how Cook’s history could lead to an understanding of reconciliation,

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particularly when in the popular imagination he is seen as a destructive and divisive figure, associated more with conflict than with reconciliation. This paradox led me to this research.

In Cooktown, Cook’s visit had been historically performed and remembered as a moment of possession; the place where he came ashore and allegedly claimed Australia for His Majesty King George III. But, in the late 1990s, some residents of Cooktown started to look more critically into this local history by attempting to understand the encounters that took place between the *Endeavour*’s crew and the Guugu Yimithirr people in 1770. This critical approach, reflective of developments in historical treatments of early contact history more broadly, resulted in a collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members through which the annual Cook re-enactment was rescripted; the local James Cook Museum allocated exhibition space to tell the Indigenous perspective of the encounters; and new monuments were added alongside the numerous Captain Cook tributes in the local landscape. Alongside the re-envisioning of Cook’s visit, other histories began to be publicly shared in Cooktown, including those which shed light on Guugu Yimithirr histories, pre- and post-Cook. Community members also began to use the encounters in 1770 as a platform to publicly discuss more difficult histories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, which facilitated new understandings of these relations in the present.

This article analyses the sites and projects of reconciliation in Cooktown from the 1990s to the present. It examines the ways in which the popular historical narratives and understandings have been redefined through community processes of ‘sharing histories’. Popular sites and practices of historical remembrance such as performances, the museum and both existing and new monuments are examined and described to understand the politics of reconciliation in Cooktown. As the meanings of these public sites of remembrance are activated through engagement with them,


7 Goodall, ‘Too Early yet or Not Soon Enough?’; Attwood, ‘Unsettling Pasts’; Edmonds, “‘Walking Together’ for Reconciliation”.
I draw on my experience of visiting Cooktown in June 2019 to participate in the annual ‘Discovery Festival’. This is supplemented by publicly available interviews and lectures given by key community members who have been instrumental in this process of ‘sharing histories’. Recently, a number of historians and cultural theorists have discussed the nature and politics of remembering Cook in Cooktown, and the article draws on their insights. In particular, historian Mark McKenna has discussed the local landscape of history and memory to make the broader argument that ‘Cooktown’s founding moment is one guiding light’ for Australia to understand how to reconcile with its complicated history of oppression for a democratic society.

This essay argues that it is not Cooktown’s founding moment that is significant for reconciliation, but rather the local processes of engaging with history in the present; significantly, it is the ongoing working relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents in Cooktown that has facilitated processes of reconciliation. This is most evident in the process by which the script of the re-enactment has been rewritten and the performance expanded and changed as a result. Tracing this and other local history projects, the article reveals the ways in which a linear, yet inclusive, narrative has been created, as well as how new spaces have been prised open for telling new histories. The article concludes by reasserting the strengths of a grassroots approach to reconciling history.

Revising the past

Prior to 1998, Cook was publicly remembered in Cooktown for his founding achievements. From 1959 to 2008, the pivotal scene in the annual re-enactment was borrowed from the possession ceremony that took place on Possession Island, where Cook raised the Union Jack, claiming the east coast for His Majesty King George III. In the Cooktown re-enactment’s version of this event, muskets were fired towards the Guugu Yimithirr people as they stood behind the flag, and they consequently disappeared into the bushes. The possession ceremony was then acted out in their absence, and muskets were fired into the sky in commemoration. This was the final scene. The re-enactment finished, real time began, and the rest, as they say, ‘is history’.

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10 McKenna, ‘Gangaar (Cooktown), North Queensland’, 198–99.
Cook was the hero and the founder in this re-enactment, and the Guugu Yimithirr people were marginal. They were on the periphery of the stage, and once the flag was raised they became the backdrop to the performance. Much like similar re-enactments that took place in Kurnell and various other places around Australia, there was no opening scene detailing the lives of Indigenous peoples before Cook arrived and no closing scene pondering their lives after his departure. Their disappearance into the bush marked the re-enactment’s finale, and thus the difficult shared history that followed with British colonisation was evaded.

Storytelling is powerful. The story of Cook taking possession of Australia has been used synonymously with terra nullius; the belief that this land belonged to no one before Cook claimed it. The use of this story in Cooktown performed a similar purpose; it reasserted white possession of the area. This was not a true representation of what took place on the shore of Waalumbaal Birri in 1770, and the Cooktown community felt that this story needed to be retold.

In the late 1990s, the process of revising the story of Cook’s visit began with the collaboration of Eric Deeral and John MacDonald. MacDonald was an actor and local resident of Cooktown, and he contacted Indigenous Elder and former politician Eric Deeral to assist him with the process of rescripting the annual re-enactment. Deeral had approached this task before. Iain McCalman recalls that to support the Guugu Yimithirr land rights claim in the early 1990s, Deeral:

had assembled a set of portfolios placing local oral traditions and topographical investigations alongside research done on Western lines, thereby creating an empirically based record of the long-term presence of this tribe and its clans area.

Furthermore, Cook’s journals had provided written evidence of the Guugu Yimithirr people’s connection to the land. McCalman remembers Deeral ‘grinning broadly’ and saying ‘Cook was now helping to repair some of the damage he’d begun’.

On 11 November 1997, the Premier of Queensland signed off on the agreement that recognised traditional and non-traditional owners of Hope Vale. The clans of Hope Vale had won their native title claim for 110,000 hectares of Cape York

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13 ‘1770 – Part 2 – The Re-enactment’, 0:00:00–00:08:01.
15 Behrendt, ‘Speaking Out’.
16 Nugent, Captain Cook Was Here.
17 McKenna, ‘Gangaar (Cooktown), North Queensland’, 199.
19 McCalman, The Reef, 22.
20 Hope Vale was a Lutheran mission that neighboured Cooktown. During the campaign for native title, the land was occupied by a number of clans. Some clans were traditional owners and some were not, but had historical ties to the land. After some time, these clans came into agreement with boundaries and put forward a proposal for their native title claim as ‘the Congress of Clans’. French, ‘A Moment of Change’.
from Cooktown to the Jeannie River. Larissa Behrendt argues that sharing stories is a way of telling truth. Truth that has a far greater reach than arguments for legislative reform and political recognition. Revising the encounter between the British and the Guugu Yimithirr was more than just rescripting the re-enactment: it was a process of revising popular history that had previously overshadowed, indeed denied, the Guugu Yimithirr people’s rights to their Country. Their participation as co-authors of the story, and as prominent participants in the performance, would contribute to replacing denial with recognition. This was an act of truth-telling.

Rescripting the re-enactment required a collaborative approach from non-Indigenous and Indigenous community members. Penny Edmonds, in her analysis of the Myall Creek Massacre memorial, suggests that privileging Indigenous epistemology and taking a grassroots approach to the commemoration was vital to the ceremony at Myall Creek being an active performance of reconciliation. In their journals, Cook and Banks described events that unfolded at Waalumba Birri, and detailed their encounters with the Guugu Yimithirr people. But their observations were limited by their European perspective and understanding.

The re-enactment had reflected a popular historical narrative of Captain Cook since its establishment in 1959 that rested on an Anglo-Australian perspective. In order to reconcile this popular understanding of the encounters, the research process focused on understanding the actions of the Guugu Yimithirr people through oral histories that existed in the Guugu Yimithirr community.

One exchange in particular, between Cook and an old Guugu Yimithirr man, became the focal point of the re-enactment, and prompted rich cultural exchange within the research process. Towards the end of the Endeavour’s stay, two Guugu Yimithirr men came aboard the vessel, in what was supposed to be a civil exchange similar to those that had taken place over the previous days. Cook had gone on an inland expedition to view the land from a nearby hill. But on boarding the ship, the Guugu Yimithirr men saw 12 turtles on the deck that the crew had hunted over the previous days. They tried to grab the turtles, but the crewmembers present would not let them. Things became hostile. The Guugu Yimithirr men left the Endeavour.

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21 French, ‘A Moment of Change’.
25 As noted previously, Waalumba Birri is the river that Cook named Endeavour River. ‘Loretta Sullivan and Alberta Hornsby April Luncheon 2015’, 35:50.
The following day more Guugu Yimithirr men came to the *Endeavour* and again tried to grab the turtles. A scuffle took place on board and the Guugu Yimithirr men left the *Endeavour*, empty-handed. Following their departure, they set the coastline alight, engulfing some of the crew’s belongings and a pig. Gunshots were fired at the Guugu Yimithirr people and the Guugu Yimithirr men threw spears at the crew, which the crew grabbed.

After some time had passed, accompanied by a younger man, an old man stepped out of the bush, wiping his armpits and inhaling the sweat from his hands, holding a spear without a point. Cook approached the man and saw this as a sign of peace. He gave the old man the spears back, which Cook believed ‘reconciled everything’.28 The two parted ways and the Guugu Yimithirr people did not approach the *Endeavour* again for the remainder of their stay.29

This exchange between the old Guugu Yimithirr man and Cook became the central focus in the work to reinterpret and re-remember Cook’s visit. By analysing this event from the perspectives of the British crew and the Guugu Yimithirr people, the community members involved in the research developed a new understanding of Cook’s encounters and time there.30 The performance became both commemorative as well as educative as it began to move away from its monumental origins as a possession narrative and to reveal other truths to community members about the landscape they occupied and the traditional owners whose land had been taken from them.31

Through their research, the community members discovered that the site on which Cooktown was built was a place of neutrality – it was used for birthing and as a meeting place at which no blood was to be spilled. They further learnt that the ceremony performed by the old man was *ngalangundaama* – a ceremony for peace.32 Moreover, the disagreement between Cook and the Guugu Yimithirr men shed light on hunting practices that worked with the seasons – helping to explain the local men’s anger about the dead turtles they saw on the deck. These practices came into conflict with the crew’s aims to stock up on food for their journey home. The research became much more than rescripting the past, it became a pedagogical process of exchange between two cultures.

The research helped not only to develop the understanding of the encounter in 1770, but also an understanding of both the Guugu Yimithirr’s and the crew’s cultural practices more broadly. Eric Deeral’s niece, Alberta Hornsby, recalls seeing the re-enactment for the first time in 2008, and being ‘disheartened by the lack of Guugu Yimithirr history’ that was performed.\(^3^3\) As a result, she became involved with the re-enactment, and Deeral encouraged her to read the *Endeavour* journals. As Hornsby became more involved in the revision of the encounters that took place in 1770, she developed an admiration both for Cook and for her ancestors. She read the journals closely and began to learn more about her own history and her people.\(^3^4\) The rescripting of the re-enactment moved beyond the performance, as it sparked a process of ‘sharing histories’ and cultural understandings that helped reshape local understanding of the Guugu Yimithirr people and settlers.\(^3^5\)

Cook had been remembered for the purpose of territorial possession since the town’s establishment; the research process began to unsettle that story.\(^3^6\) The process of rescripting the re-enactment had reduced Cook to a participant in the performance, rather than the lead. As a result, the new story of the *Endeavour*’s stay began to look beyond Cook and appreciate the complex interactions that surrounded him. Hornsby discusses her distaste for Cook when she was a child, and her later appreciation for his navigational skills and his diplomacy as she became part of the research process.\(^3^7\) In this way rather than situating Cook as a ‘promise of peace and reconciliation’, as McKenna argues, he is reduced from his mythical dichotomy of founder and dispossessor and set aside as merely a participant in history.\(^3^8\)

The rescripting of the encounter also facilitated institutional change and attracted government funding. In July 2001, Queensland Senator and Federal Regional Services Minister Ian Macdonald announced that the Commonwealth Government would be supporting the renovation and extension of the James Cook Museum by donating $2.3 million. At this time, Eric Deeral was commissioned to rewrite the history of the encounter in 1770 for the museum.\(^3^9\) Macdonald stated that ‘This close liaison has brought to this project a balanced perspective of historical events and objects, giving visitors a unique European and Indigenous perspective to one of the significant events in Australian history’.\(^4^0\) The renovation was planned to help attract more tourists to the area and to incorporate the Guugu Yimithirr

\(^{35}\) McKenna, ‘Gangaar (Cooktown), North Queensland’, 199–211.
\(^{36}\) McKenna, ‘Gangaar (Cooktown), North Queensland’.
\(^{38}\) McKenna, ‘Gangaar (Cooktown), North Queensland’, 209.
\(^{40}\) Macdonald, ‘Cooktown Museum Project’. 
perspective of the past. Rescripting the re-enactment began to have an effect on
the institutional representation of history in the town, one that began to portray
a shared perspective of the past.

The process of ‘sharing histories’ within Cooktown has led to the incorporation of
other histories into the town’s local history. In 1998, the Milbi Wall (story wall) was
built in Cooktown. It was positioned on the banks of the Waalumbaal Birri where
Cook and his crew came ashore. The wall is divided into three sections: creation
stories that confirm the long history of the Guugu Yimidhirr people; stories about
the effects of white occupation that began with Cook and continued with settlement
of Cooktown; and representations of the significance of the 1967 referendum when
Aboriginal people were first counted in the reckoning of the nation and responsibility
for Aboriginal affairs was assumed by the federal government. The wall was
constructed as a reconciliation project by Gungarde Aboriginal Corporation, which
is a local Aboriginal community-focused organisation that provides accommodation,
health programs, access to education and work opportunities, ‘whilst promoting
the preservation of Aboriginal social and cultural integrity’ in Cooktown and the
surrounding areas. As cultural theorist Tony Bennett observes, the wall ‘asserts
a long pre-invasion history, which also relativises the moment of “discovery” as
merely one in a succession of contact histories’. Cook’s visit is conveyed as an
episode, yet an episode that is an exception to the rule of the violent European–
Aboriginal relations that followed. In this instance, Cook provides an example of
respectful relations, even as the wall continues to tell the history of the Guugu
Yimidhirr people, which also actively undermines Cook’s actions of possession as the
land was already possessed.

Cook’s visit has also been used as a platform beyond Cooktown to discuss and
challenge conflicting and ‘untruthful’ histories. In 2012, for instance, Alberta
Hornsby delivered a lecture at the National Library of Australia’s ‘Cook’s Treasures’
seminar. She used Cook’s visit to Waalumbaal Birri to discuss common assumptions
that she called myths. She discussed terra nullius, and used the evidence of Cook’s
encounters with Indigenous peoples to show and confirm that terra nullius was and is
a myth. Here she further expanded to teach the audience about the culture, language
and history of the Guugu Yimidhirr people. The second myth she discussed was that
the crew from the Endeavour had raped the Guugu Yimidhirr women. She suggested
there is no evidence for this, but she used this topic as a prompt to talk about the
violent treatment and dispossession of Aboriginal people since settlement. The final

44 Thomas, ‘Epilogue’.
45 Hornsby, ‘Dispelling the Myths’.
myth that she presented was that the conflict from the *Endeavour* voyage continued to this day. She used this myth to talk about the diplomacy that Cook and the old Guugu Yimidhirr man showed in 1770, and suggested that the current process of reconciliation can learn a lot from the simplicity of this exchange, particularly giving the spears back. This alludes to the topics of native title and Aboriginal sovereignty.

Hornsby tactfully used the exchange that took place in 1770 to discuss current political tensions and the lessons that can be learnt from the past. The story of Cook and the old Guugu Yimidhirr man has become a platform for discussion on reconciliation processes more broadly.\footnote{McKenna, ‘Gangaar (Cooktown), North Queensland’.

\footnote{‘The Discovery Festival’, *The Weekend Post*, 19 September 2009.}

### Ritualising reconciliation

![Figure 1: The re-enactment crew at Cook’s Monument, 2019.](source: With permission from the Cook Shire Council.)

After more than 10 years of collaborative work, the new script was debuted in 2009 for the 50th anniversary of the Cooktown re-enactment. Hornsby and long-serving member of the Re-enactment Association, and the then president, Loretta Sullivan were largely responsible for presenting the new narrative. ‘Two cultures, one people’ was the theme of the re-enactment. The Re-enactment Association ‘wanted to complete the story based on fact by researching Cook’s accounts of events’,\footnote{‘The Discovery Festival’, *The Weekend Post*, 19 September 2009.} but it
had become more than this. In the process, the research had become a rich cultural exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of the past. The process of ‘sharing histories’ had become the product of a new ‘shared history’ that allowed space for different perspectives and epistemologies.48

In 2019, I visited Cooktown to experience the ‘Discovery Festival’. The Discovery Festival was originally created in 1979 to extend the celebration of Cook’s visit, and in recent years it has begun to incorporate Indigenous performances alongside the re-enactment.49 In 2019, the ‘Indigenous Showcase’ took place the night before the re-enactment. This performance publicly verified the presence of Guugu Yimithirr history on this land, before Cook. The way in which live performances are delivered and received changes through the years.50 Particularly in Cooktown, the annual re-enactment and the Indigenous Showcase are community projects, where they are always seeking to refine and add value to the performance.51 The performances are not static. The scaffolding of the rescripted encounter has stayed the same since 2009, but the re-enactment is refined with each performance, emphasising the important moments of the past in the present.52 Therefore, the following observations are based on these performances in 2019 and their effects in that time.

In this section, I examine the active performances of reconciliation in Cooktown by drawing on Lisa Schirch’s understanding of peacebuilding spaces. I define the re-enactment and the Indigenous Showcase as rituals – spaces where symbolic exchanges take place. Schirch argues that ‘ritual removes people in conflict from the site of their problematic relationships’.53 As a result, I explore how these performances create ‘peacebuilding spaces’ – spaces where symbolic acts and rituals of conflict resolution can take place.54

The re-enactment was as much a memory of the Guugu Yimithirr people as it was of Cook. The stage was on the banks of Waalumbaal Birri, near where Cook had come ashore in 1770 on Guugu Yimithirr Country. The space was significant to both European and Guugu Yimithirr history. Prior to 2009 this space had been used to convey history through a European lens of possession, but today the space had developed new meaning creating a place for a ‘shared history’ to be performed.55 The space had been reclaimed by the Guugu Yimithirr people and the setting became

48 Attwood, ‘Unsettling Pasts’; Edmonds, ‘“Walking Together” for Reconciliation’.
53 Schirch, Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding, 76.
54 Schirch, Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding, Chapter 5; Edmonds, ‘“Walking Together” for Reconciliation’, 119.
55 Tuan, Space and Place.
a place of equal power. Elder and Eric Deeral's daughter, Erica Deeral, stepped onto the stage with the group of bama performers. She spoke in Guugu Yimithirr as she introduced us to the bama and to the land. Ironically, compared to original re-enactments, Cook was behind the bushes while the Guugu Yimithirr people were introduced. The performance was used, in a sense, to reverse the narrative that the re-enactment had once favoured by opening with the Guugu Yimithirr side of the story.

The introduction of the Guugu Yimithirr people on stage was followed by a shared performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors. ‘Peacebuilding rituals’ create an idealised world between cultures in which histories are listened to without day-to-day social restrictions and therefore a form of reconciliation can take place. The narration of the re-enactment was then shared equally between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous narrators. Loretta Sullivan narrated the crew’s thoughts and movements, and Alberta Hornsby narrated the Guugu Yimithirr’s. This was now a shared story of the past, where each side would have their turn to share their perspective. The performance provided a space for histories to be shared – they stepped into an idealised world where Indigenous and non-Indigenous sides to history were voiced and listened to.

Schirch contends that ‘ritual space develops in part when a unique combination of people join in some unique action’. Cook and the old Guugu Yimithirr man are both actors of reconciliation. They meet in the centre of the stage, which is initiated by the old Guugu Yimithirr man. Hornsby explains that the old man’s actions were calling for protection and an atmosphere of peace. Sullivan explains that by giving back the spears Cook ‘reconciled everything’. The re-enactment has become a place of neutrality, like the land that surrounds Waalumbaal Birri, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters met in the centre of the stage with equal agency.

The scene brings the audience into the present. The reconciliation scene is the pivotal moment of the re-enactment, followed by Cook and his crew leaving the Endeavour River. Sullivan stated, ‘we believe this was the first recorded act of reconciliation in Australia’s history’. Schirch observes that ‘ritual can help connect the past with

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56 Schirch, Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding, 68.
59 Schirch, Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding, 72–73.
60 Edmonds, ‘Walking Together’ for Reconciliation, 119.
61 Schirch, Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding, 72.
the present by using a symbolic time to communicate the transformation toward
a new future’. The performance redefines the popular narrative that dominated the
re-enactment pre-2009.

Popular histories hold considerable power over the way a nation views its past,
and by redefining the narrative from possession to reconciliation the re-enactment
becomes an active performance of peacemaking. The performance gives a snapshot
of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives of the past can be performed
and how – by creating a neutral space for this revision to take place – popular
histories can be redefined.

This neutral space has also been used to share different histories. The Indigenous
Showcase that took place the night before the re-enactment opened with a musical
duo, Tamara Gibson and Harold Bowen, who sang songs that had significance to
their people. They sang their song ‘Evac’, which told the story of their people’s
evacuation from Cape Bedford during the Second World War. The lyrics ‘Do you
recall the day, when they took our people away from Jepson’s to Sandy Bay? By army
trucks that came?’ were followed by a chorus in Guugu Yimidhirr. The audience were
not privy to the translation of the chorus, but the sentiments were clear – during
World War II the residents were evacuated from Cape Bedford Mission and the
reasons why have never been confirmed. The issues that it caused for the Guugu
Yimidhirr people have never been resolved. Noel Pearson highlights the lasting
impacts to Elders on Cape York Peninsula to this day. They were displaced, their
community was uprooted and many community members never returned.

Inga Clendinnen argues that in order for us to understand how the past has shaped the
present we need ‘good history, true stories of the making of this present land, none of
them simple, some of them painful, all of them part of our individual histories’. Local
Bulgun Warra man and the Indigenous Project Officer and Indigenous Guide at the
James Cook Museum Harold Ludwick, who I had the pleasure of spending time with
in Cooktown, emphasises that we still need to have conversations about dispossession
that took place after Cook and about Indigenous views on history. He argues that
the performance of reconciliation should not overshadow the history of violence and
dispossession that also took place; these stories still need to be told and their ongoing
issues resolved. The performance shared stories from the past, most of them difficult
and some of them hopeful. The stage, situated down by Waluumbaal Birri where the
re-enactment took place the next day, detached the space from Cook’s arrival and

64 Schirch, Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding, 70.
65 Healy, ‘History, History Everywhere But …’, 183; Edmonds, ‘“Walking Together” for Reconciliation’.
66 See, Richards, ‘“What a Howl There Would Be If Some of Our Folk Were so Treated by an Enemy”’; Pearson,
‘Guugu Yimidhirr History’, 131–236.
67 Pearson, Up from the Mission, 139–42.
the space was used to voice histories that complicate the understanding of a peaceful
process of colonisation. The performance promoted truth-telling by creating a space
where more difficult histories could be shared publicly.\(^{70}\)

The Warrma\(^{71}\) was the main event that followed, in which Indigenous dancers
performed some of their histories that pre-dated Cook. Tamara Pearson, a Guugu
Yimithirr and Guugu Yalanji woman, choreographed the children from the Hope
Vale Sacred Creations Dance Troupe as they acted out these histories and shared
their dances. Harold Ludwick was the master of ceremonies and coordinated the
onstage performances. Ludwick has been responsible for organising the Hope Vale
dancers and helping coordinate the Indigenous Showcase for the past two years.\(^{72}\)

![Figure 2: Yirrambal the rainbow serpent, 2019.](image)

Source: With permission from Sacred Creations Dance Troupe.

The Hope Vale dancers were all children, and they were presented to the audience
as the vision for their people’s future – keeping their history and culture strong.
The spaces where rituals take place allow for new ideas and relationships to be
performed. They are detached from the prominent concerns of the present and
therefore ritual is encouraged and the meanings of different performances are

\(^{70}\) Edmonds, “‘Walking Together’ for Reconciliation”; Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*.

\(^{71}\) ‘Warrma’ is a Guugu Yimithirr word meaning dance or corroboree. Harold Ludwick, email to Charlotte Ward,
16 September 2019.

\(^{72}\) Harold Ludwick, in conversation with Charlotte Ward, 13 June 2019.
explored openly.\textsuperscript{73} The histories the Hope Vale dancers shared pre-dated Cook and their performance was scheduled before the re-enactment. It was Guugu Yimithirr history, told by their people, in their form – we learnt about Yirrambal Rainbow Serpent and his creation story, the spirit Dilabulu who took care of naughty children and their totem owl who watches over them. The Discovery Festival has become a space to share and ‘discover’ different histories, unrelated to Cook’s visit.

**Conclusion**

Noel Pearson argues that one of the key issues that divides Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is ‘the troubling business of trying to come to terms with history and the fact that history still lives amongst us and will never depart from us’.\textsuperscript{74} Yet, in Cooktown Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents have come together to renegotiate how they remember their shared history. It has required a collaborative approach between Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents that has moved beyond the event in 1770. By revisiting the encounter between Cook’s crew and the Guugu Yimithirr people, community members and institutions have begun a process of remembering histories that have previously been overshadowed by the public remembrance of Cook.

The first prominent monument of Cook still stands today in the centre of town. But the town’s monumental landscape has expanded to incorporate different perspectives of his visit as well as different histories altogether. As you drive into Cooktown from the inland route, one of the first sites to visit is Reconciliation Rocks. This is the most recent addition to Cooktown’s monument collection, but ironically it is one of the oldest. The rocks have always been there, but their significance has not always been recognised. They mark the spot where the reconciliation between Cook and the old Guugu Yimithirr man took place. The place was heritage listed by the National Trust in 2019, the year this was written. Bennett notes that in Cooktown:

> most of the major heritage sites in the town today, while preserving these earlier testaments [of colonial possession] to its monumental history, also include Indigenous critiques of celebratory presentations of Cook while simultaneously foregrounding the longer history of the Guugu Yimithirr in rebuttal of narratives of discovery.\textsuperscript{75}

The re-enactment in Cooktown acts as a site of negotiation. The performance creates a space where local residents act out their history. Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members volunteer their time, bring ideas to rehearsals and debate the accuracy and importance of their history. As Schirch contends, ‘space

\textsuperscript{73} Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, Chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{74} Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, *The People’s Movement for Reconciliation*, 32.

\textsuperscript{75} Bennett, ‘Part III: Assembling and Governing Cultures’, 273.
matters’. The annual re-enactment creates a space for ‘peacebuilding dramas’ to be performed, meaning that the space now promotes a sharing of histories, rather than a restrictive narrative of possession. Each time the performance is held it is refined, and the moments that resonate most in the present are emphasised and changed. The performance is not so much about how historically accurate the re-enactment is; it is about what the performers choose to remember, how they remember, and what is produced that allows a process of reconciliation of the past to occur.

Furthermore, the space that has been created as a result allows different histories to be performed. The Indigenous Showcase acts as a platform to celebrate history and culture of the Guugu Yimithirr people, but it also helps raise more difficult shared histories and their lasting effects that are yet to be reconciled. Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members in Cooktown is an ongoing process. One that will continue to take place both on and off the stage. But continuing this process from a shared view of history is a good place to start.

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Nervous nation: Fear, conflict and narratives of fortified domestic architecture on the Queensland frontier

Heather Burke, Ray Kerkhove, Lynley A. Wallis, Cathy Keys and Bryce Barker

Abstract: The frontier of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australia was a place in which colonists routinely lived in fear of retaliation by the Aboriginal peoples whose traditional lands they had forcibly dispossessed. It has been suggested this concern manifested itself in domestic architecture, in both active and passive defensive strategies designed to afford protection against various forms of potential attack. Yet there remains a lack of substantive research to support such assertions. In this article, we present an analysis of accounts drawn from a range of sources of 97 domestic structures across Queensland with claims for defensive features. Although suggesting that fortified domestic structures were more common than previously envisaged, our review indicates that defensive features were usually minimal – holes in walls and barrable doors, windows or other ports of entry – reflecting the often expedient nature of the structures themselves. First-hand accounts of these buildings are rare, although not entirely absent, with most written accounts being reminiscences told in hindsight by later descendants, resulting in both distortions and myth-building. Accounts of fortified domestic structures peak in the decades following Federation and through both World Wars as the newly minted Australian nation explicitly engaged in nation-building and constructing the ‘glorious pioneer’ narrative.
Introduction

A recent survey of the documentary evidence relating to the frontier in colonial Van Diemen’s Land, Australia, argued that ‘fear was the most significant of the emotions characterising the wartime experiences of colonists’.1 Colonists were afraid for their financial livelihoods, property, stock and personal physical safety, as well as that of others around them, employing a range of defensive tactics to protect themselves. Clements and Gregg went further to argue that this ‘atmosphere of terror and anxiety’:

forced numerous architectural and behavioural changes. Remote residences became ‘fortresses’ and few ventured beyond their huts without guns, dogs or companions. In extreme cases, fear even drove people off their farms.2

In identifying defensive behaviours employed by colonists to protect life and property (including laying turf on roofs to prevent fire, enclosing buildings within log palisades or high brick walls, extensive clearing around properties, incorporating apertures into walls to accommodate gunfire and placing windows higher up the walls than usual), Clements and Gregg connected fear with a range of material correlates.3 They were not the first to do so. Decades earlier, Reynolds and Loos alluded to the state of ‘communal insecurity’ among nineteenth-century Europeans in Queensland, regardless of whether they were small groups living in isolation or residents of towns.4 Likewise, Evans cited direct references from colonists in the more remote outposts of the frontier that spoke directly to the ‘strain and terror involved in contending with the unknown wilds’.5 Previous historical work also attempted to link a necessity for personal defence with the incorporation of defensive features into domestic architecture, some going so far as to claim that, ‘Indeed, “solidly built slab homesteads and huts with loopholes pierced in the thick walls for rifles” would seem to have been the frontier norm in South-East Queensland’.6

Occasional studies of surviving colonial period structures by archaeologists, however, have been more conditional.7 While both Grguric and Wiltshire, Litster and Rigney identified particular architectural features that could have functioned defensively, such as small openings in walls in structures in South Australia and the Northern Territory, they also noted that these were common architectural

1 Clements and Gregg, “I Am Frightened Out of My Life”, 223.
3 Clements and Gregg, “I Am Frightened Out of My Life”, 232–33.
elements and therefore might have only been used opportunistically for defence. In the case of Wiltshire, Litster and Rigney, they argued that the defensive function ascribed to vertical slits in an outbuilding on the Coorong peninsula was a later reinterpretation, probably functioning as a mnemonic to cohere Aboriginal people’s recollections of violence in the wider region.  

8 Except for Kerkhove’s typology, which aligns these structures with the militarised nature of early Queensland, other studies have argued that such equivocation renders the subsequent romanticising of such features as symbolic of the frontier a more relevant measure for understanding past and present settler–Aboriginal relations than the ‘truth’ of a defensive purpose itself.  

A lack of research in this area is symptomatic of the political and perhaps psychological difficulties that drive contemporary Australian memory of the colonial period.  

From the slavery-forts of coastal Africa to the log stockades of the American West, domestic and military fortifications targeting Indigenous peoples have been part and parcel of European colonial expansion.  

11 By contrast, architectural historians maintain that domestic Australia had no such structures.  

12 Although Australian colonies had coastal defences and penal fortifications, their interiors had little in the way of unambiguous defensive structures and no system of strategically placed, centralised forts, as was the case in the United States.  

13 Instead, the internal frontier was a much more diffuse and malleable borderland animated by the personal choices and actions of settlers and itinerants and, in some colonies – especially Queensland – government agents such as the Native Mounted Police.

By populating this frontier borderlands, civilian settlers placed themselves at the ‘front line’ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal realms. It is therefore unsurprising that many of the spaces involved in frontier war skirmishes are described as domestic. A desktop study of frontier domestic structures provides an important means of probing patterns in purported structural defences – were such buildings commonplace? Who built them, where and when? What materials were they built from? What were the most common features? Such a survey can help to understand the scale and nature of domestic fortification and, by adopting an historical (and historiographical) perspective, enable some assessment of the reliability of tales of domestic fortification over time. As such, this article begins with an assessment of the nature and extent of fears about attack and uses this to focus more closely on the potential behavioural consequences this fear may have engendered through an analysis of accounts of potentially fortified structures across Queensland.

8 Wiltshire, Litster and Rigney, ‘Necessary Self-defence’.

9 Burke et al., ‘The Homestead as Fortress’; Kerkhove, ‘Frontier War Defences of Early Queensland’.


Fear and lethal danger on the frontier

Although settler anxieties about the frontier were at times manufactured or amplified, there is little doubt that fear was a common emotion. Fear and anxiety are separate, yet linked states. Fear describes the heightened awareness of an immediate, objective threat; anxiety is the anticipation of a subjective menace that may or may not arise in reality. There are sufficient historical accounts to support widespread fear and anxiety on the part of settler colonists in many contexts, much of which would have arisen in response to the toll of ongoing conflict.

Regardless of whether and/or how we choose to acknowledge them today, the frontier wars inflicted real and devastating loss and damage. While difficult to calculate, estimates suggest that more than 66,000 Aboriginal people in Queensland were likely to have suffered fatal attacks during the second half of the nineteenth century, constituting around 25 per cent of the population. Tallies for non-Aboriginal casualties ought to be easier to estimate given that the creators of the archival record had greater concern for their own lives, yet the figures are not much clearer. Early assessments by Reynolds and Loos posited 400–450 and 381–470, respectively, for north Queensland between 1860 and 1900. Gray later proposed 1,500 European deaths across the continent from c. 1788 to 1930, while Richards suggested 324 Europeans were killed between 1859 and 1904 in Queensland. Data collected for the Archaeology of the Native Mounted Police project calculated 673 non-Aboriginal deaths in Queensland between 1840 and 1902, with the highest tolls during the 1860s and 1870s. The number of people living in rural contexts in Queensland rose from just over 15,000 to 204,000 between 1861 and 1901, suggesting that, on average, around 1 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population of that period may have been killed by Aboriginal people.

Such calculations are of course retrospective and conducted with due academic rigour to produce a minimum assessment. Those who lived through such periods may have believed the tallies to be much higher, exaggerated by false rumour and premature reports in the press. As Noel Loos has pointed out, however, it is the number of lives thought to have been lost or in imminent danger that was most important in catalysing settler fear. For instance, William Ogilvie and Roderick Mitchell claimed that on the Maranoa over an 18-month period between 1849 and 2019—

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15 Evans and Ørsted-Jensen, ‘I Cannot Say the Numbers that Were Killed’.
16 Reynolds ‘Racial Violence in North Queensland’, 22; Loos, Invasion and Resistance, 193.
20 Loos, Invasion and Resistance, 45.
1850 ‘no less than one-fifth of the white population have been murdered by the aborigines’. \textsuperscript{21} Later in the 1850s, one commentator claimed the same proportion ‘fell in two years’ in the Port Curtis district. \textsuperscript{22} Robert Gray, a squatter who settled in the vicinity of Hughenden in the mid-1860s, felt that:

> People residing in those districts at the present day … may think I am exaggerating when I say that during the ‘sixties probably ten to fifteen per cent of the white population lost their lives at the hands of the blacks. An officer who was in the native police at that day told me he put the percentage at from twenty to thirty.\textsuperscript{23}

Certainly, specific regions and particular time periods saw greater concentrations of loss. Captain John Coley, a resident of Brisbane from 1842, suggested before a Select Committee in 1861 that 250 Europeans had been killed in south-east Queensland between 1824 and 1853; in a 1967 study, Taylor was able to verify from archival documents that at least 161 of these 250 deaths were correct.\textsuperscript{24} Thus, during the 1840s–1850s in south-eastern Queensland, around 8 per cent of the European population had died as a result of Aboriginal attacks.

A dread of being killed or losing friends and kin was further amplified by losses to stock and property, especially when such actions were intended to intimidate and terrify new settlers. John Ker Wilson recalled that as soon as he tried to move north into Queensland near Goondiwindi in 1846 or 1847, Aboriginal groups targeted his stock. At one point, he counted 80 speared carcasses of cattle, ‘some of the heads … cut off and stuck up on sticks’.\textsuperscript{25} In the same time period and place, Margaret Young recalled her intense feeling of vulnerability:

> All stock had to be yarded [with] one of the men to guard … One night they (the blacks) stole 200 of our young ewes, all due to lamb … Later they returned again, spearing most of the horses, cows and calves … [We were] so alone and isolated … the interior silence and black darkness so suddenly engulfed us … [and] further out, all across the plain … as far as we could see … were lights from the fireplaces of the blacks.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{22} Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 6 November 1858, 76.
\textsuperscript{23} Gray, Reminiscences of India and North Queensland, 78.
\textsuperscript{24} John Coley, quoted in Queensland Legislative Assembly, Select Committee on the Native Police Force, 19; Taylor, ‘Race Relations in South East Queensland’, 30.
\textsuperscript{25} Ward-Brown, ‘Native Mounted Police’, 2975/8, Box 5273, John Oxley Library.
\textsuperscript{26} Young, cited in Gunn, Links with the Past, 26–27.
The culmination of this dread was a range of defensive postures: carrying firearms, monitoring surroundings and, wherever possible, seeking protection in groups. In 1853, Commissioner of Crown Lands Arthur Halloran, for instance, noted that the inhabitants of Maryborough considered it:

unsafe to go about even near [the] township without fire arms, no one travels from Maryborough to this Station (in an isolated position), distance 4 miles, without being armed – [even] troopers will not go far without fire arms.

The situation was especially frightening for women. The relegation of women to the domestic sphere tethered them both to the house and its immediate environs and to solitary periods in the absence of a husband, male family member or worker. For example, Lucy Gray, the wife of pastoralist Robert Gray at Hughenden, recounted the anxieties of ‘Mrs C’ (Alethea Cox Corfield) in the early 1870s, who ‘was in perpetual fear of the blacks, & with good reason for they had murdered her brother down at the Gulf where she had been living & where they were numerous and dangerous … when we rode out she saw a black-fellow in every stump or stone half hidden in the grass’.

Similarly, Rosa Campbell Praed grew up during the 1850s not far from the site of the infamous Hornet Bank massacre. She claimed her earliest memory was an incident wherein ‘a black face’ peered between the half-closed shutters of her parents’ hut, and her father – himself out hunting for ‘the black murderer of an out-shepherd’ – returned in the nick of time. Campbell Praed described her girlhood as a time when:

women practiced at targets with firearms, and the men would ride home with a sinking feeling in their hearts, fearing for their wives and children. Often I heard father describe how each evening coming in from the run, he used in cold fear to mount the hill overlooking the humpy, and draw free breath when he saw it lying quiet and unharmed.

It is reasonable to assume that the perception of threat brought with it certain material consequences, and a review of extant documents provides a useful tool for interrogating the potential existence of such phenomena. We focus here solely on domestic structures, as these dominate the narratives of frontier violence.

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27 See Reynolds, Frontier, 9–22, for a wide-ranging discussion.
28 Arthur Halloran to Chief Commissioner of Crown Lands, 10 December 1853, NSW Colonial Secretary Letters Relating to Moreton Bay and Queensland 1822–1860, Reel A2.28, QSL.
30 Gray, ‘Life on the Flinders River’, 21. Note that this diary entry is not dated, but Edward More Meredyth Huey, Alethea’s brother, was killed in 1871, so it must postdate this.
31 Courier-Mail (Brisbane), 2 April 1949, 2.
32 Campbell Praed, My Australian Girlhood, 352.
Source materials

The current study was conducted by casting a wide net for images, reminiscences and descriptions of ‘fortified’ homes and huts. The vast majority of accounts derived from digitised newspapers in the National Library of Australia’s Trove resource. Such articles were generally published in smaller, rural newspapers and most consisted of elderly individuals recalling their early experiences or visitors recounting local lore. Other research focused on locating documents that detailed ‘early’ life in Queensland c. 1840–1910, including manuscripts, theses, memoirs, papers, books and letters within the John Oxley collection (State Library of Queensland), Fryer Library, Welsby collection (Royal Historical Society of Queensland), New South Wales Archives, Mitchell Library, Queensland State Archives, and a few smaller regional historical libraries and museums. Though some 60 sources were located in this manner, very few detailed ‘fortified’ structures. Similarly, many collections of early photos of ‘pioneer’ huts were assessed, though almost none of these images possessed sufficient detail or clarity to allow their features to be assessed.

We defined ‘domestic’ as any civilian structure used for regular working, cooking, sleeping or relaxing. We eliminated any descriptions that were too generic (e.g. ‘every habitation [in the St George area]’ or ‘almost every homestead on the Belyando’) and focused on accounts that referred to a specific pastoral run or structure that could be plotted with some precision.33 We researched all identifiable authors, their familiarity with the region, broader knowledge of the topic and their proximity to the source. Thus each account was assessed for its reliability according to the identifiability and credibility of the author and its degree of separation from the original builder, owner, manager or other occupier of the structure. ‘First-hand accounts’ were therefore defined as those provided by initial builders or inhabitants, or people who visited or knew the place intimately, regardless of when they were written. ‘Second-hand accounts’ usually derived from children of the original owners/occupiers and were typically recorded at a much later date, when this second generation themselves were classed as ‘old pioneers’. ‘Third-hand’ or further removed accounts denoted stories from grandchildren or subsequent owners and other, later sources, many of which could only be attributed to a generic origin (e.g. ‘old timers’). These could only be classified as ‘local lore’. We acknowledge that such data are incomplete, given that written sources on frontier violence are often partial.34 Moreover, first-hand accounts were rarely contemporaneous, as builders or users were not usually in a position to write reports until decades after. We also acknowledge that many accounts, regardless of their origin, were only published much later as memoirs, leading to the possibility that they could have been edited for content prior to publication, but this is impossible to trace without original, unpublished versions.

33 Balonne Beacon (St George), 20 December 1951, 10; Townsville Daily Bulletin, 14 July 1947, 7.
34 See Foster, “Don’t Mention the War”.
A fortified frontier?

Our survey generated 125 accounts of 97 different structures across Queensland (Figure 1). The majority of accounts derived from third-hand or further removed sources (64 per cent; n=78), while 22 per cent (n=28) were better-provenanced second-hand accounts (Figure 2). Just 13 per cent (n=17) were first-hand accounts (Table 1).

![Map of Queensland showing locations of fortified properties](image-url)

**Figure 1: Location of properties with claimed defensive features and main locations mentioned in the text.**
Source: Authors’ data.
First-hand descriptions by Ernest Henry (1859), C. S. Rowe (1864) and William Hill (1865) of structures on the Burdekin River, John McCartney of his run near Proserpine (c. 1866), John Carpenter of the Ockabulla run on the Maranoa River (1851) and prospectors on the Coleman River (1878) all refer to buildings they themselves built or inhabited. Henry's description of a stockade built by George Dalrymple's reconnaissance party in 1859 derives from Henry's letters written at the time and is particularly detailed:

We placed four upright poles in the ground enclosing a space about 12 ft by 8 ft then joined them by long saplings passed through the forks at the top, dug a trench about 1½ ft deep all round in which we placed saplings leaning a little outwards against those at the top. We then placed all plates against the upright to keep them firm, filled in the trench, first laying poles on either side at the base of the saplings. We then placed two very tall forked poles at either end with a ridge pole across and spread our largest tent over all. Altogether it was very strong and well loop-holed, the walls were 8 or 9 feet high.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{35} Ernest Henry, cited in Breslin, \textit{Exterminate with Pride}, 41.
Table 1: First-hand accounts of defensive domestic architecture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Date of structure</th>
<th>Date of account</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Burdekin</td>
<td>Stockade</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>1859</td>
<td>Breslin, <em>Exterminate with Pride</em>, 41</td>
<td>Account of Ernest Henry, who was on the Burdekin expedition with Dalrymple, sourced from Henry’s early letters held in James Cook University library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Borgorah, near St George</td>
<td>Stockade</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>1923</td>
<td><em>Daily Mail</em>, 13 October 1923, 16</td>
<td>C. W. Court recalling his time at the station in 1854 (‘In 1854 ... I accompanied, the Hon. Robert Fitzgerald when that gentleman went out to the Balonne to take over Borgorah station’).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Coleman River</td>
<td>Hut</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td>1878</td>
<td><em>Australian Town and Country Journal</em>, 11 May 1878, 22</td>
<td>Russell and Robert Sefton describing their trip to the Coleman River immediately prior to the publication of the article.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Fanning River</td>
<td>Hut</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td><em>Cummins and Campbell’s Monthly Magazine</em>, May 1931, 18</td>
<td>C. S. Rowe, member of John Melton Black’s party to take up runs on the Burdekin River. This is a direct account from the builder, although published much later. He was on the first expedition to Cleveland Bay in November 1864, where they built another ‘log hut’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Date of structure</td>
<td>Date of account</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Kinnoul outstation, 5 miles from Kinnoul Homestead, near Burnt Knob (Taroom)</td>
<td>Hut</td>
<td>Possibly 1850s to 1870s given mention of original name of Taroom</td>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Steering Wheel and Society and Home, 2 March 1936, 42 (RHSQ Massacres file 7040)</td>
<td>Account of James T. McLaren of Hughenden, the protagonist in the story, about his actions at the age of 12. Told in retrospect many years later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Mornington Island</td>
<td>Presbyterian Mission Station residence</td>
<td>October 1917</td>
<td>1918 (January)</td>
<td>Echuca and Moama Advertiser and Farmer’s Gazette, 5 January 1918, 3</td>
<td>Mr Walter Owen, assistant missionary, retelling death of Rev. Robert Hall during an 18 October 1917 raid at a public speech in Melbourne. Direct eyewitness account to a very recent event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Ockabulla Station, Maranoa</td>
<td>Hut</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>1851</td>
<td>Moreton Bay Courier, 23 August 1851, 2</td>
<td>Direct account given at the time. Deposition on oath to the Commissioner of Crown Lands by eyewitness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Reedy Lake, Burdekin</td>
<td>Manager’s house</td>
<td>1865</td>
<td>1907; 1953</td>
<td>Hill 1907:30; Townsville Daily Bulletin, 4 February 1953, 7</td>
<td>W. R. O. Hill’s Memoirs. Direct account from Hill, who was the manager on Reedy Lake at the time, although in a later published memoir.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Date of structure</td>
<td>Date of account</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>-------</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. St Helen’s Station, Proserpine</td>
<td>Homestead</td>
<td>c. 1866</td>
<td>1899; 1909; 1925; 1937</td>
<td>1. <em>Capricornian</em>, 12 August 1899, 52 2. <em>Capricornian</em>, 27 February 1909, 4 3. <em>Daily Mercury</em>, 12 November 1925, 9 4. <em>Daily Mercury</em>, 2 October 1937, 10</td>
<td>1. Reminiscences of Sir John McCartney, former owner of St Helen’s. 2. No source. 3. ‘The following, in the words of Sir Wm McCartney …’. The descriptions from 1925 and 1937 imply more protection than loop-holes, although this is not clear. It is also not clear why, with the doors and windows left open, they felt safe from spears. Brothers John and William McCartney on the St Helen’s run by 1866, but precise date of lease uncertain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Tiaro</td>
<td>Hut</td>
<td>1854</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Beardmore, ‘Glimpses’, 477</td>
<td>George Oakes Beardmore’s account of his hut-building at Tiaro 1854, published posthumously. ‘The main living and sleeping hut received most attention in view of possible attack from “myalls” – strong doors and window shutters, and loop-holes in the walls for firing through.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Warra (near Dalby and Chinchilla)</td>
<td>Hut</td>
<td>c. 1850–1855</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td><em>Northern Star</em>, 13 February 1913, 8</td>
<td>Geo A. Dickson ‘one of the oldest citizens of Queensland’, b. 1834. Not clear that the ‘aperture’ was deliberately made. Dickson accompanied J. M. Andrews of Jondaryan Station, and worked for early settlers Colin McKenzie (Warra) and Matthew Goggs (Chinchilla).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Second- and third-hand accounts to same structures also included. 
Source: Authors’ data.
Similarly, John Carpenter’s deposition was made to a magistrate when he was a hutkeeper on Ockabulla in 1851. When attacked he:

barricaded the door, opened the port-holes (which are usually made in huts on the frontiers, for the purpose of resisting the assaults of the natives), and laid the fire-arms on the table. From one of the port-holes he saw about five hundred blacks assembled … They blocked up the port-holes before Carpenter had an opportunity of firing at them, but he stabbed one of them in the eye through a chink beside one of the holes … some … climbed on to the roof of the hut, and set fire to the bark roofing.\textsuperscript{36}

The ‘log hut’ erected by a prospecting party to the Coleman River in 1878 was described by its builders only a few months after its construction.\textsuperscript{37} This particular account is further supported by description of a second hut, ‘strongly built of squared logs, loopholed and spear-proof’, erected by the same party near Coen, that was visited by Robert Logan Jack in 1879 and so has both a first-hand and a second-hand account attached to it.\textsuperscript{38} An account of Lammermoor by Robert Gray in 1868 and another of Hornet Bank by Charles Ogg in 1860 both describe buildings visited not long after their construction or alteration for defensive purposes. The account from Mornington Island in 1918, though relatively late, can also be considered reliable in that it refers to events that took place less than three months before its date of publication.\textsuperscript{39}

A second finding is that the structures proposed as being fortified were predominantly homesteads or the main huts on sheep or cattle runs (55 per cent of all accounts), followed by adjacent outbuildings (12 per cent) and outstations (13 per cent). This is not surprising given that nineteenth-century pastoral runs were vast unfenced domains containing large numbers of stock; these, apart from the nuclei of a head station, relied on a network of widely separated outstations to monitor animals, paddocks and water sources.\textsuperscript{40} The latter were usually important resource areas for Aboriginal people, transforming pastoral runs into one of the main arenas for conflict.

\textsuperscript{36} Moreton Bay Courier (Brisbane), 23 August 1851, 2.
\textsuperscript{37} Australian Town and Country Journal (Sydney), 11 May 1878, 22.
\textsuperscript{38} Jack, Northmost Australia. This is described as a ‘loopholed log hut’ in an earlier account by Jack in the Wingham Chronicle and Manning River Observer, 17 June 1916, 7.
\textsuperscript{39} Echuca and Moama Advertiser and Farmer’s Gazette, 5 January 1918, 3.
\textsuperscript{40} Hodgson, Reminiscences of Australia.
Potential defensive elements

We found a relatively restricted range of rather simple features being regularly described as defensive (Table 2). Unfortunately, many accounts lacked precision and provided insufficient detail regarding form, size or placement, or used vague descriptors, such as ‘thick walls’ or ‘heavily built outhouses’.

Table 2: Summary of architectural elements associated with the defence of domestic structures in Queensland.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architectural feature/element</th>
<th>Frequency (no. of references)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blockhouses</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Log’ cabins</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loop-holes (including apertures, port-holes, slits and slots)</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barricades (including palisade fencing)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mud walls or plastering</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone walls</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commanding position/view</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (water tower, refuge room, stockade, dense wire netting across windows)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>130</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Some structures possess more than one element.
Source: Authors’ analysis.
Loop-holes

By far the most commonly described features were ‘loop-holes’, variously labelled as slots, slits, port-holes, apertures or ‘shooting holes’. Some huts were described as entirely windowless except for such apertures, while other references alluded to the use of ‘port-holes’ as hatches that could be both readily shut or blocked and positions from which to shoot at attackers. In terms of construction, loop-holes were most often described as cut, bored (e.g. sites at Rookwood, Cockatoo), pierced (e.g. Waroo) or augered through timber slabs (e.g. sites at Imbil, Yandina Creek, Herbert River). All first-hand accounts referred to some version of a loop-hole. Perhaps the best observer among this group was Robert Gray, a member of the 97th Regiment of Foot, who participated in the final siege of Lucknow (British India) in 1858. In describing Lammermoor Station in north-west Queensland in 1868, built by his friend and neighbour, Robert Christison, Gray noted: ‘My friend had then a substantial and neatly erected log hut with loopholes for rifles’. Owing to his prior military experience, Gray could be expected to know a functioning loop-hole when he saw one.

In terms of the form a loop-hole took, most accounts implied round holes, especially those that described them as having been augered. The description of Yandina Station on the Sunshine Coast, for example, referred to ‘three inch [7.5 cm] auger holes’. Descriptions of the Miriam Vale, Tintinchilla and Retreat Stations included square holes, and one account referred to vertical slits or slots (at Jimbour, near Dalby). Another (referring either to Urbana Station, near Jericho, or Mexico Station on the Diamantina River) described a small window, 1 foot (approximately 30 cm) square and elevated 5 feet (1.5 m) above the ground built into each wall, while a second-hand account of the homestead on the Tarome and Moogerah runs near Warwick described ‘three auger holes breast high in each slab’.

A second-hand account of Retreat Station near Mackay, referring to c. 1860, described loop-holes positioned strategically at the corners of a hut:

> at each corner, there was a sort of square, port hole cut just big enough to sight a gun. There were twelve of these holes in this hut, and a gun and ammunition hanging up alongside each one.
Corner placement is a particularly effective tactic, as demonstrated by the late nineteenth-century Cape York telegraph stations:

at each corner of the houses small rooms about 4ft. or 5ft. square will be provided in which, if at any time the building were attacked by blacks, the inmates could secrete themselves, and through loopholes provided for the purpose, fire upon the enemy. The rooms and loopholes are to be arranged so as to enable the marksmen to cover a very large area of ground on each side of the angle.  

A slab hut on Hawkwood Station in the Burnett District (c.1850s–1860s), allegedly went a step further:

there were slots cut in the slab walls through which aperture a rifle could be used for protecting the inhabitants from the wild blacks. When the rifle was withdrawn a piece of iron would drop across the hole on the inside so that spears thrown at the hut could not find a way through these apertures.

Two unreliable local lore accounts specified loop-holes positioned at different heights. One (at Hamilton, near Mackay, built c. 1863), claimed that the upper was specifically for viewing and the lower ‘to protrude the barrel of a gun in an attack’. The second (Teebar homestead), published as part of an obituary for Elizabeth Thomas, daughter of John Eaton, who took up Teebar from Henry Cox Corfield in 1856, alleged sets of ‘slanting’ holes ‘cut low down in the walls, to enable those inside to send a raking cross fire’. There are various issues with the vagueness of this description, including what is meant by ‘slanting’, the height relationship between the two sets of holes, and the limitations of older muzzle-loading weapons – the relative slowness of which would have prevented anything approaching a ‘raking cross fire’. However, it was standard practice to fire from shoulder height and shooters often preferred elevated holes (which they accessed by standing on boxes), to allow better vantage.

Small round holes in the walls of a hut are less likely to function successfully as defensive elements for a number of reasons. First, a single hole by itself is ineffective, since it provides no means for the occupant to simultaneously shoot and be able to view the threat. Two settlers, George Harris and Thomas Welsby, recalled that small holes were generally bored as ‘peep holes’ for surveillance rather than shooting, which suggests many of these openings have been misidentified.

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48 Queenslander (Brisbane), 30 January 1886, 165.
49 Bloxsome, ‘Discovery, Exploration and Early Settlement of the Upper Burnett’, 344.
50 Manning, In Their Own Hands, 90.
51 Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser, 24 November 1933, 6.
52 Rod Pratt, email communication to Ray Kerkhove, 9 April 2019.
53 Harris, ‘Reminiscences of My Early Days in Ipswich’, Fryer Library, F344; Courier-Mail (Brisbane), 18 February 1939, 7.
the expedient use of gaps between slabs for surveillance purposes (e.g. Maryvale, near Warwick). Second, they would need to be angled outwards in order to be effective, and even then their field of fire would have been relatively limited.

One defensive advantage of loop-holes was that they could be created opportunistically. A first-hand account from Mornington Island described cutting ‘loop holes in the galvanised iron walls … with a tin-opener’, while another first-hand account from far north Queensland described augering convenient holes in the timber floorboards of a high-set building during an event. Likewise George Harris’s account claimed ‘peep holes’ were enlarged for shooting only if the need arose.

**Blockhouses and log cabins**

Although mentioned more rarely, another architectural reference is to ‘blockhouses’ and/or ‘log cabins’. A blockhouse is an overtly militaristic feature, built either inside a fort or occupying a defensive position of its own. In the United States in the eighteenth century they were typically cantilevered, with an upper floor projecting outwards above the lower, loop-holes provided around the circumference on both storeys, and sometimes hatches in the upper-storey floor. Two storey blockhouses are also found in New Zealand and include features such as milled timber walls and double exterior walling filled with gravel, clay or other protection against gunfire, and were often built with palisades or other external physical barriers. None of the Queensland descriptions featured two storey buildings with cantilevering, wall filling or external palisades, although most accounts were too imprecise to determine how the structures were built. The term was also often used to describe timber slab construction, which was, by its nature, quite solid (e.g. a ‘slab-walled blockhouse kitchen’), and sometimes the terms ‘stockade’ and ‘blockhouse’ were used interchangeably. None of the accounts referred to milled timber buildings. Chronologically, the term ‘blockhouse’ only arose in twentieth-century accounts, the earliest of which dates from 1935. This suggests that the term is a retrospective designation used generically rather than a description of a specific, recognised structural form. Its use should therefore be treated with caution.

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55 Harris, ‘Reminiscences’, Fryer Library, F 344.
57 Prickett, *The Archaeology of the New Zealand Wars*; Walton, *New Zealand Redoubts, Stockades and Blockhouses*.
58 See, for example, Linn, ‘An American Treasure in Fairbanks’; and examples in Prickett, *The Archaeology of the New Zealand Wars*, and Prickett and McGovern-Wilson, *Planning a Future for New Zealand War Sites and Landscapes*, which are all single storey timber structures, although still unusually built.
One structure described as a blockhouse – Glenmore, built near Rockhampton in 1858 – has been described as such since 1935. However, this more accurately describes its log cabin style of construction rather than its form *per se* (Figure 4). The State Heritage listing for the property (Place ID 600823) describes it as ‘a one room hut built of horizontal logs checked into each other at the corners and lined with bark’. A second structure, built in 1864 at Fanning River inland from Townsville, also employed notched-corner log cabin construction, in this case in accordance with New Zealand practice. A direct account by C. S. Rowe, one of the builders and a member of John Melton Black’s party to take up runs at Fanning River, claimed that:

All hands set to work to cut timber for building a log hut. The architect and moving spirit was Joe Dunn. He had seen how things were done in New Zealand. Huge logs, dove-tailed at the corners, were rolled up on skids. With holes cut here and there for our rifles, they afforded a valuable protection. It afterwards turned out that our precautions were hardly necessary. We never saw a black about the station for twelve months. The hut, however, lasted for many years.

A later visitor to the run described the building in 1880 as ‘long and roomy, built of round logs and roofed with ironbark’.

Miles Lewis has noted the confusing tendency in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature to mislabel slab buildings as ‘log’ huts, but these latter descriptions are clearly referring to a genuine form of log construction. Lewis noted that both palisaded poles set into a trench with horizontally or vertically framed logs, and the more iconic US notched-corner style were common across Australia. Although the log cabin style was more unusual in the tropical north, similar log cabins were built at Merri Merriwah (Figure 5) and Reedy Lake, both on the Burdekin River, at about the same time as the 1864 Fanning River structure. Reedy Lake was also claimed by its first inhabitant, William Hill, to have been built defensively, albeit for the loop-holes it included rather than its construction technique. Charles Eden noted of Merri Merriwah that ‘[t]he house, in place of the usual slabs, was built of whole she-oak trees, plenty of which grew in the creek adjoining’, but did not claim this to be defensive.

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60 See also Miles Lewis, ‘2.02 Logs’, Australian Building: A Cultural Investigation, 31, accessed 19 July 2019, mileslewis.net/australian-building/.
61 Cummins and Campbell’s Monthly Magazine (Townsville), May 1931, 18.
62 Stevenson, Seven Years in the Australian Bush, 29–30.
63 Lewis, ‘2.02 Logs’.
64 Allingham, Taming the Wilderness, 71; Bell, ‘TFTA Fanning Sectors’.
65 Hill, Forty-five Years’ Experience in North Queensland, 30.
66 Eden, My Wife and I in Queensland, 134.
Other structural features

Our survey noted claims for several other defensive features, including small, high-set windows (Knockbreak, near Gayndah [second-hand account]), wooden shutters and doors that could be bolted (Davenport Downs, Fossilbrook and Barcaldine Downs [first-hand and third-hand]), bars or dense wire netting across windows and chimneys (Wollogorang, Fossilbrook, Mundoolun and Belyando [second-hand and third-hand]), a refuge room (Paynter's Creek [second-hand]), external fencing (Burgorah, near St George [first-hand], Inverdon and Sweer's Island [second-hand]) and elevation (The Peninsula [third-hand]).
Wooden shutters were ubiquitous on early buildings because glass was expensive and difficult to acquire, and the only other option was an uncovered opening, although being able to close and strongly secure openings provided obvious defensive benefits. At Albinia Downs, Robert Patton noted that the Dutton family always secured the house at night, a situation that was only ameliorated by the arrival of the Native Mounted Police in 1860. Others were less circumspect. Describing the hut he inhabited on St Helen’s Station near Proserpine c. 1866, John McCartney noted that, although the hut was loop-holed ‘we did not bother to close the doors or shutters, knowing we were safe from spears’.68

An external palisade (or ‘stockade’) was mentioned in several accounts, although only Dalrymple’s structure on the Burdekin, referred to previously, provided details of form. C. W. Court, who accompanied Robert Fitzgerald when he took over Burgorah Station near St George in 1854, for example, recalled in 1923 how:

it was absolutely necessary, after dark, to be within the precincts of the stockade which was erected around the homestead. We mounted no cannon, and did not even possess a ‘Brown Bess,’ but there were four old blunder busses, fired by flints, stationed at each corner, and it was our usual custom, after having first loaded them with gravel, to fire one occasionally at sun down, just as a warning.69

On Sweer’s Island, a second-hand account by a visitor from Normanton in 1883 described preparations that also included protecting the domestic water source:

Here we found a large bouse strongly palisaded, and having wooden defence works. The house was occupied by one man, his wife, and family. We were informed that the palisades had been erected as a protection from the blacks who dwell on the neighbouring Islands, and that every member of the household could use the rifle … A well was sunk within the enclosure, and a pump had been fixed upon a high stage. From this pump wooden troughing or guttering had been laid to the beach, and it was there that vessels obtained water.70

Remembering the frontier

Another approach to this body of data is to analyse how it was assembled over time, and the implications of the circulation of such accounts for the construction of a broader settler colonial narrative. Although the structures were built between the 1840s and the 1890s, the stories related to them were published between 1851

67 Sydney Morning Herald, 1 December 1862, 2.
68 Capricornian (Rockhampton), 27 February 1909, 4.
69 Daily Mail (Brisbane), 13 October 1923, 16.
70 Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser, 30 December 1901, 3.
and 2019, with the majority clustering between the 1910s and the 1950s (Figure 6). The hiatus between the construction of a building and the telling of a fortification story relating to it ranges from no delay to over a century.

![Figure 6: Distribution of accounts across time.](image)

Source: Authors’ data.

Fortification narratives began notably to rise in the first decade of the 1900s. As much of Queensland was settled during the 1840s–1870s, this partly reflects the fact that many of the original hut builders were then in old-age, with enough time (and suitable public interest) to offer a fuller account of their lives. By this point their experiences were considered intriguing, as the conditions they experienced were no longer normative. However, this rise also dovetails with the development, over the following three decades, of the classic pioneer tale: a knitting together of individual, family and regional histories into a narrative of achievement and attainment that exemplified the progress of Queensland as a colony and a state. Building on earlier imagined foundations represented in image (Figures 7 and 8) and word (e.g. John Farrell’s 1901 poem, ‘The Last Bullet’), such accounts perpetuated a disruptive racial inversion by repositioning Aboriginal people as the raiders of European territory:

> Indigenous people are seen as entering the settler space (and disturbing an otherwise serene unperturbed circumstance) after the beginning of the colonisation process … Settler colonial narratives, of course … celebrate violence against Indigenous people, but always as a defensive battle ensuring the continued survival of the settler community and never as founding violence per se.\(^{71}\)

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\(^{71}\) Veracini, ‘Settler Collective, Founding Violence and Disavowal’, 366, 371, italics in original.
Figure 7: The ultimate moment of settler defence: ‘Besieged by Blacks’.
Source: Australasian Sketcher with Pen and Pencil (Melbourne), 21 March 1874, 215.
The popularity of fortification narratives was strengthened in the 1920s and 1930s by the progress of Australian nationalism in the aftermath of the First World War. Political tussles during these decades were informed by the British imperialism of the right-wing parties, and the more self-reliant and less British-focused form of nationalism preferred by the left. The pioneers constituted one pillar of the left’s ‘true Australianness’, interwoven at the local level with attempts to secure the tenure of white occupation within particular regions. Consequently, nostalgia coloured these interpretations, as illustrated by Andrew Crombie in the 1920s when mourning the loss of the fortified homestead at Terrick Terrick:

In coming years, and in the face of modern improvements, the old log hut gradually lost status. From Government House it became the store, later it was the meat house, and next the old building was converted into a fowl house on a magnificent scale. Some years after this I visited Terrick, and found, to my great regret, that the old log hut, which was as strong and durable as ever, had been razed to the ground, carted to the wood heap, and then burnt up for fuel. The manager, a very good fellow, was absolutely devoid of sentiment in connection with pioneers and their great achievements. And so this monument of successful pioneering disappeared in smoke.

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72 Dryenfurth, ‘Labor and the Anzac Legend’.
74 Queenslander (Brisbane), 12 September 1925, 11.
Fox’s 1919 three-volume *History of Queensland* canonised the nostalgic pioneer story and its sacred elements, constructed as it was from interviews with hundreds of multi-generational pastoral families. exhibit all of the features of Slotkin’s frontier mythos, *History of Queensland* codified familial memories around repeated elements: the ever-present threat of hostile natives, the perils of environment, climate and distance, the values of perseverance and endurance, and the goal of ‘building up … a home for himself and future generations of his name – and by the service rendered to the nation in the opening up of the country’. Many of these stories were being told by the second generation and so had already passed into family lore. The frequency of repetition of the trope throughout Fox’s three volumes reveals the emergence of a narrative that became common across most of the twentieth century.

A second spike in fortification narratives took place in the 1950s. The relative prominence of such narratives in newspapers and local histories during this decade can be set against the wider, national historiographical trend to muffle the history of Aboriginal Australia. In other words, while general histories tended to overlook conflict between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, local histories continued to be constructed in relation to it, creating what Nettelbeck and Foster have termed ‘a more discomfiting relationship between European settlement and Aboriginal dispossession’. Australia in the post–Second World War era embraced modernity, affecting technology, transportation, communications and architecture alike. The social and cultural changes this brought paradoxically also created a nostalgia for what was perceived to be an idealised, ‘authentic’ and fast-vanishing past, a development that Kerr linked to a burgeoning domestic travel industry connected to high rates of Australian motor car ownership.

John Murphy’s *Imagining the Fifties* sheds light on an underlying gender current of this decade that married aggressive with domestic definitions of masculinity to create the image of men as the ultimate protectors, ‘prepared to defend their families, their homes and their country’. Such sentiments painted well onto a dangerous imagined historical frontier.

Further recirculation of such stories in the 1970s coincided with a shift in interest from the pioneer narratives of resourceful forebears to the first mainstream historical arguments for frontier violence as an unacknowledged component of Australian local and national history. The 1988 Bicentenary provided an obvious focus for documenting these components, and a ‘priority of violence and drama’ became

75 Fox, *The History of Queensland.*
76 Fox, *The History of Queensland*, Volume 1, 308–9; Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*.
77 Broome, ‘Historians, Aborigines and Australia’; Curthoys, ‘Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Historical Mythology’.
79 Kerr, ‘Through the Rear View Mirror’; see Greenwood, ‘Driving through History’, for the origins of this phenomenon in the 1920s and 1930s.
80 Murphy, *Imagining the Fifties*, 40.
central to the construction of many local histories. Many such histories co-opted claims for both fortified structures and massacres into their narratives as evidence of Aboriginal resistance, even though fortification tales were birthed by earlier strands of local history making and an admiration for white settlement that ran counter to stories of massacres.

Finally, the resurgence of interest in the subject generated by the ‘History Wars’ in the early 2000s gave a new lease of life to fortification accounts. As Ryan has pointed out, rather than heralding an end to the discussion of violence, the debate this engendered between historians initiated an era of closely detailed local studies that have ‘transformed massacres into a subject of study in their own right’.

**Fortifying the frontier**

Several insights arise from this synthesis. First, the current study supports to some extent the likelihood that domestic structures across Queensland included defensive features, and that this may have been widespread both geographically and chronologically. The defensive features associated with these structures were minimal, however – holes in walls, and barrable doors, windows or other entry ports – reflecting the often expedient and simple nature of the structures themselves. We found that at least some first-hand, reliable accounts of these buildings and their elements as being defensive exist – even if rare – and their presence alone indicates that incorporating defensive elements into buildings was not unknown. Although this was a behaviour that was rarely recorded by primary witnesses in the Queensland context, it is possible, given the nature and extent of settler fear and anxiety in the nineteenth century, that it was more common than we can now reconstruct. This suggests that settlers on the outer edge of any given frontier may well have viewed themselves (wrongly or rightly) as potentially embroiled in the ‘front line’ of the frontier wars. This means we agree with Clements and Gregg that settler fear was sufficiently widespread along the frontier that it may have provided motivation for creating crude or complex ‘fortification’. This was probably more pronounced in the wake of specific events, especially pivotal attacks on European settlers. The best example is the widespread panic following the killing of 11 members of the Fraser family party at Hornet Bank in 1857 and 19 members of the Wills family party at Cullin-la-ringo in 1861. It is possible that architectural modifications were made in this context to enhance existing, or introduce new, defensive elements. Charles Ogg, a Presbyterian minister who travelled widely throughout the colony in the 1850s and 1860s, for example, described defensive alterations made to the original Hornet Bank homestead in the aftermath of the Fraser deaths:

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81 Roberts, ‘Bell Falls Massacre and Bathurst’s History of Violence’, 628.
82 Ryan, ‘Untangling Aboriginal Resistance and the Settler Punitive Expedition’, 258.
We found the place well supplied with arms, and all about with their pistols in their belts. There was no window, or, what had been once a window, was now boarded up, with bars across inside and out. The chimney had bars placed across it also in various ways to prevent ingress in that way. On the door post as I entered was still to be seen the blood of victims who had perished in a former attack upon the station. At sundown the place was closed up, and the doors fastened by two heavy bars right across them. It was under these circumstances that I held the first service at the station. On retiring at night each bed room door was again barred off the sitting room, and each apartment well supplied with arms. There was a small port hole in my bedroom, which I was shewn how to open in case of attack. My arms consisted of a double-barrelled rifle which stood at the head of the bed; a large pistol hanging on one of the bed posts, and two more hung by the mirror, besides a sword and dagger, whose edges I looked at and saw that they were intended for keen work.\(^{83}\)

Moreover, fear enveloped the entire district, as local squatters and their employees waged a prolonged and concerted campaign of death and displacement against Aboriginal people.\(^{84}\) Squatters such as George Pearce Serocold, of nearby Cokatoo Station, noted:

> There is now war to the knife, and we are not without apprehensions of our head station being attacked at night – large pillars of smoke are being sent up all round to the West and to the North – being signals from one camp to the other – Your pistols have become my daily companions – and we are well prepared whenever they come.\(^{85}\)

In the 1940s, to mark the centenary of St George, Ellen Meacle retold her girlhood experience of this paranoia in what is now St George, fully 320 kilometres distant from the massacre:

> just at sunset, a sweating stockman, on a nearly spent horse, reached the homestead at Mt Driven, bringing the news which he had received from another rider, and which was to be relayed on through the district of the murder of the Frazer family by the blacks, at Hornet Bank … [This news] was held to be of sufficient importance to warrant the prompt issue of a warning, by relay riders, over several hundred miles of country. Every aborigine, even the friendliest, was [now] suspect; every habitation a miniature fort with loopholed walls and heavily-shuttered windows; every kitchen cupboard … a small arsenal.\(^{86}\)

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83. *Moreton Bay Courier* (Brisbane), 11 August 1860, 3.
84. Reid, ‘A Nest of Hornets’.
85. George Pearce Serocold to Charles Serocold, 3 March 1858, Tennant Estate Papers, D/D T 2974/7, West Glamorgan Archive Service.
86. *Daily Mail* (Brisbane), 20 July 1926, 17.
Second, a cluster of notched-corner log cabins in the mid-1860s around the Burdekin River (at Reedy Lake, Merri Merriwah and Fanning River) tantalisingly suggests that there may have been some regional trends in defensive architecture, although stylistic and pragmatic considerations can also explain such differences.

Finally, the majority of accounts considered here were second-hand or further removed, many of which had a specific context of remembrance that calls their validity into question. These reminiscences, told in hindsight by later descendants, are likely to be thus in many cases inflated – perhaps influenced by the ‘pioneer narratives’ described above. The embroidering of domestic defence into later personal, familial and regional narratives, while rendering tales of particular buildings suspect, is nonetheless itself something that needs to be considered in its own right. In this sense they fortify the frontier in another way: as touchstones for wider contexts of remembering and forgetting.

**Nervous nation**

Disavowal of all founding violence, however, cannot allay anxiety. Notwithstanding obsessively repeated representations of ‘quiet country’ and ‘peaceful settlement’, the settler fears revenge.\(^{87}\)

The variety of accounts of potentially fortified domestic structures collected for this article betray a nervousness among the residents of the frontier – especially those who were most vulnerable personally or situationally – that might not have been universal, but was certainly widespread, pointed and genuine. In this respect, domestic fortifications of the frontier are highly significant for Australian architectural history. Although they were humble structures, they were in part psychological attempts to exert control over fear and anxiety, even if settler belief in the hostility of Aboriginal people represented ‘typical attitudes in contemporary colonial society [rather] than a response to the situation at hand’.\(^{88}\) In other words, many of those who subscribed to general nineteenth-century polemics about Aboriginal people were more prone to perceive hostility even in the absence of it, and accordingly exaggerated the ‘savage’ propensities of Aboriginal people. Such presumptions could quickly lead to offensive actions, such as taking possession of canoes and weapons, or destroying camps, weapons or other objects that in turn propagated actual hostile responses and reified the fear. In the presumption of hostility, it is also possible that some architectural features may have been added simply to intimidate local groups, or to impress visitors with the purported safety or status of the structure.

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\(^{87}\) Veracini, ‘Settler Collective, Founding Violence and Disavowal’, 368.

\(^{88}\) Breslin, *Exterminate with Pride*, 41.
The 97 structures analysed here also highlight something of the contours of memory that mapped the frontier for later generations, akin to Hirsch’s notion of ‘post-memory’. Post-memory is concerned with how second and third generations remember the critical life events of their parents and grandparents and is essentially the working of family memory through various prompts – photographs, literature, film, monuments or, in this case, physical structures and features. The heritage of a defensive frontier (fragmentary as it is) assumes particular importance in the construction of these tales. A ‘fortified’ house or a ‘loop-holed’ slab – regardless of whether it is the actual structure or the family tale of one – becomes what Slotkin labelled ‘mythic icons’: ‘symbols … that effect a poetic construction of tremendous economy and compression and a mnemonic device capable of evoking a complex system of historical associations by a single image or phrase’. The creation of a unitary settler identity in hindsight is reminiscent of similar processes for constructing a corporate identity from the communal insecurity of a contested frontier operating in places such as South Africa.

The legacy of this anxiety from the past is the tension around forgetting and remembering the frontier wars that has been illuminated by so many post-modern scholars in the present. Veracini observed that the settler colonial project invariably begins in the wilful perception of a vacuum (‘virgin land’ or, in Australia’s case, ‘terra nullius’), which is subsequently transformed into a different form of absence through demographic loss, or the tendency to depopulate the country of Indigenous peoples in representations (typified by the notion of the ‘dying pillow’, but also in the many claims made for the inexplicable absence of Aboriginal people from the landscape). This is the schizophrenia of absence identified by Delrez, who argued that national self-definition in Australia ‘depended from the first upon the perpetuation of a singular collective amnesia, but also on the further desire to transform this mnemonic gap into a form of historical memory’. In other words, although frontier violence was in many ways erased at the time of its committal, it was nonetheless also indelibly remembered through means such as the material qualities of domestic structures.

The transformation of amnesia into memory is perhaps better understood within the context of the figures for non-Aboriginal deaths on the frontier. The seemingly small percentage (1 per cent by our calculations) of such deaths, in fact, demonstrates the severity of the frontier wars. Australian deaths in better documented conflicts when the non-Aboriginal population was much higher, rarely attained greater percentages

91 See, for example, Lester, ‘Reformulating Identities’.
92 See, for example, Atwood, ‘Unsettling Pasts’; Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and (Re)Conciliation*; Veracini, ‘Settler Collective, Founding Violence and Disavowal’.
per head of population. In the Second World War the figure was 27,000, or 0.38 per cent of the population, compared to far smaller numbers for Afghanistan (41 deaths), Korea (340) or Vietnam (521).\textsuperscript{95} Even the 60,000 lives lost in the First World War amounted to only 1.5 per cent of total population. In contrast, both Loos’s and Taylor’s estimates for the specific regions of far north Queensland and Moreton Bay, respectively, exceed this, providing averages on the order of 2 per cent and 8 per cent.\textsuperscript{96} If the estimates of Aboriginal deaths are added, then the figures for frontier warfare have no parallel, a situation ripe for the creation of emotional dissonance around remembering and forgetting.

Far from being forgotten in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, narratives of frontier conflict embodied through the architectural features of domestic buildings were codified and idealised, constructed into a political platform for a white settler nation and recycled to serve new uses as the politics of nationhood collided first with the complexities of Gallipoli and the Anzacs in the early part of the twentieth century, and second with the postcolonial movement that sought to unsettle and deconstruct settler colonialism in the late twentieth century. The resurgence of fortification narratives (which metaphorically fortify the frontier in the sense of shoring it up as a place of danger, aggression and defence) ties to wider conceptual flows about Aboriginal people, as well as the roots of white identity and Australian nationalism following Federation.

**Conclusion**

Our survey indicates a greater depth to the architectural materialisation of anxiety than has hitherto been articulated, even if the majority of buildings have failed to survive into the present. We therefore recognise that these data need to be further interrogated through other, complementary lines of evidence, such as recording architectural features of extant, potentially defensive structures, analysing the landscape context of particular buildings to understand other activities that may have contributed to a state of defensiveness, mapping potentially fortified structures against the context of conflict events around them, analysing regional trends in particular architectural features and researching the military or other relevant backgrounds of the builders.

In advocating any navigation of the flows of anxiety in the past and the present we consciously subscribe to a position that the events of the recent past are more important to an understanding of contemporary social politics than the longer history of ‘deep time’:


\textsuperscript{96} Loos, Invasion and Resistance, 193; Taylor, ‘Race Relations in South East Queensland’, 30.
If archaeology in Australia were to cease concerning itself with the nation’s desire for ‘depth’ it might rise, as it were, to the surface. By ‘surface’ I mean that relatively horizontal (post-1788) space or terrain across which are distributed the traces of the Aboriginal contact and post-contact experience, a terrain where duration is measured in generations (life-times) rather than millennia. If archaeology in Australia were to cease concerning itself with the nation’s desire for ‘depth’ it might rise, as it were, to the surface. By ‘surface’ I mean that relatively horizontal (post-1788) space or terrain across which are distributed the traces of the Aboriginal contact and post-contact experience, a terrain where duration is measured in generations (life-times) rather than millennia.  

Exploring such a surface is not simple, nor is it smooth. Investigating it questions the moorings of the stability of (white) identity, or, rather, shows the process by which such stability has been, and is being, achieved. This is perhaps one of the reasons why ‘Australianness’ in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been connected so strongly to the First World War rather than to prior events, since the coherence of the Anzac identity allows white Australia to sidestep events in the nineteenth century. The conceptualisation of the frontier wars, however, is nonetheless built on a similar notion of foundational heroism: 

At those moments that buried accounts of violence break through established history, the history of settlement is beset by a twin ambivalence. On the one hand, accounting for frontier violence asserts local histories of encounter over generalising national narratives of settlement. Operating in the opposite direction, violence becomes a precondition for nationhood, associating the shedding of blood with sacrifice and elevating violent encounter into a kind of civil action. To the extent that sacrifice and violence are more commonly recognised through the Gallipoli story as inaugurating Australian nationhood, they operate within longstanding discourses of masculine nationfounding in Western liberal democracies.

Byrne discussed the heritage of segregation as a landscape ‘tense with racial foreboding, paranoia, longing and deprivation’, that used a variety of physical, legislative and other means to keep groups of people separate. In terms of the conflict over and on the Queensland frontier the issue is not only how close (physically) people were allowed to come to one another, but how that proximity was regulated through fear and arbitrated through violence.

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97 Byrne, ‘Deep Nation’, 102.
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‘Puranguwana’ (‘Perishing in the Sun’) as sung by Patrick Jupiter Smith, Jack Gordon and Marie Gordon

Myfany Turpin, Felicity Meakins, Marie Mudgett, Angie Tchooga and Calista Yeoh

Abstract: Across Aboriginal Australia, Aboriginal songs are often attributed to the spirit world rather than as compositions by the living. Deceased ancestors give songs to people and such a recipient is described as the finder of a song. This is particularly evident in ‘Puranguwana’ (‘Perishing in the Sun’), a song of the public ceremonial genre known by older men and women at Balgo and Bililuna communities in the south-east Kimberley in Western Australia. The protagonist in the song is a Pintupi man called Yawalyurru Tjapangarti, who dies of thirst on Sturt Creek Station on Jaru country. The first-person perspective in the lyrics is common in Aboriginal song, rendering the singers active participants in the event. The words of the song are relatively easy to identify, which is consistent with the song’s purported recent origin. Yawalyurru is both the subject matter of the song and the song-maker. According to oral history, Yawalyurru’s spirit gave the song to the Jaru people before returning to its Pintupi country. ‘Puranguwana’ also resembles a song that was recorded at Balgo in 1981 by ethnomusicologist Richard Moyle. In 2019, Balgo residents were unfamiliar with the earlier recording and, on listening, regarded this as a different song to ‘Puranguwana’. While not identical, an analysis and comparison of both their text and music suggests that the songs are cut from the same cloth. This cloth reflects the region’s multicultural history where both desert and Kimberley linguistic groups have co-resided since the 1930s. The article aims to increase appreciation of the artistry of Aboriginal song, the complexity of its creation, and its value to Aboriginal history.
Introduction

This was my grandfather’s song. How he was perishing in the desert.
(Marie Mudgedell, pers. comm., 2016)

In this article, we consider Aboriginal history through Aboriginal languages in the medium of song. While songs in Aboriginal languages come to us mediated by ‘transcription, translation and interpretation’,¹ any written form of song is only a trifle of its performed counterpart. Aboriginal songs, in particular, are a showcase for multilingual and poetic abilities that have fine-tuned the art of multiple possible interpretations. Songs often distil the most salient aspects of experience to the people who create them.

This article focuses on one classical Aboriginal song of inland Australia. By ‘classical’ we draw on a term used by Aboriginal film-maker Rachel Perkins to refer to the musical performance traditions of pre-colonised Australia,² some of which continues to be practised today but is highly endangered.³ Unlike the term ‘traditional’, ‘classical’ better encompasses new works whose provenance is known, such as the song that is the subject of this article. ‘Puranguwana’ is attributed to a Pintupi man called Yawalyurru,⁴ and its seven verses paint a vivid picture of his spirit viewing his own death as he dies of thirst on Jaru country in the south-east Kimberley. It is said that his spirit gave the song to the Jaru residents of Sturt Creek Station (see map in Figure 1).

We presume that the song came into being in the late 1950s to early 1960s, following Yawalyurru’s death around this time. One reason we think the song is relatively recent in origin is that the lyrics are in a language very similar to that of everyday speech. This contrasts with many other classical Aboriginal songs whose words and meanings remain largely unknown, which is often taken as evidence of their antiquity.⁵ Some classical Aboriginal songs have been passed on for generations and the details of their spirit origins relegated to a time long past. For other songs, the occasion and the person who received the song are still remembered by the people

² Morris, A Rightful Place, 33. Classical Aboriginal song thus refers to songs whose music and text appear uninfluenced by non-Indigenous musical styles (e.g. pop, country, rock).
³ Many ethnomusicologists and linguists are involved in repatriation of recordings, which assists in the continuation of these traditions and improved documentation of legacy recordings. See recent volumes such as Harris, Circulating Cultures; Harris, Thieberger and Barwick, Research, Records and Responsibility; Wafer and Turpin, Recirculating Songs.
⁴ Yawalyurru was of Tjapangarti skin. According to Patrick Smith, the missionaries at Balgo named him ‘Cowman’.
⁵ Clunies Ross, Donaldson and Wild, Song of Aboriginal Australia; Wafer and Turpin, Recirculating Songs. The attribution of songs to the realm of the dead as opposed to the living is noted by researchers such as Barwick, ‘Marri Ngarr Lirrga Songs’; Ellis, Aboriginal Music; Gillen, Gillen’s Diary, 119; Maret, ‘Ghostly Voices’; Marett, Songs, Dreamings, and Ghosts; Merlan, ‘Catfish and Alligator’, 154; Moyle, Songs of the Pintupi; Munn, Walbiri Iconography, 94; Strehlow, Songs of Central Australia; Tonkinson, Mardudjara Aborigines; Wafer and Turpin, Recirculating Songs.
who sing them.\textsuperscript{6} ‘Puranguwana’ (‘Perishing in the Sun’) is one such song. In a series
of seven verses sung in the first person, the listener is privy to what Yawalyurru saw,
thought and desired as he left the world of the living and entered the spirit realm.
The song is in the voice of Yawalyurru himself, reflecting on the places and events
around him as his physical body dies and his spirit prepares to return some 500
kilometres south-east to his Pintupi country.\textsuperscript{7}

Figure 1: Map of the places and languages referred to in this article.

\textsuperscript{6} Moyle, Alyawarra Music.
\textsuperscript{7} A Pintupi site called ‘Yawulyurruru’ (note not yawalyurru) is documented in a community drawn map in Moyle,
Balgo Music, 10.
According to Mudgedell, it was one of the older men living at Sturt Creek Station who received the song and then shared it with others in the community. Frequently it is maparn – traditional healers – who obtain songs from the spirit world and bring them back to share with the living. Richard Moyle recounts Kukatja people’s description of ‘finding’ such songs as follows:

While a doctorman [maparn] lies sleeping at night, his spirit exits through his navel and flies off to a distant land. On arriving, the spirit notices something shimmering far off and recognises at once that this is a ceremony … The spirit quickly memorises the songs, then returns to the body of the still sleeping doctorman.

Pitjantjatjara elder Iluwanti Ken provides a similar description:

This is the kind of song that would be received via a dream or spirit journey while sleeping. Characteristically a person might wake up with a song in their mind and this is what these men are singing … It’s the way things are; it’s our lore. Traditional healers are taken up on an out of body travel. It is not of the world of people on earth. It’s customary for traditional healers to travel like that. Perhaps a male traditional healer would be singing as he travelled. And people love it. They sit and sing songs that detail the actions and matters of these experiences and it charges their spirits.

Still in the Western Desert, Tonkinson refers to songs ‘composed by local men after they have been “given” by spirit beings during travels the men undertake, or believe they undertake, during dreams’. Presumably this was how ‘Puranguwana’ was received. The metaphysical or spirit realm is often referred to as Tjukurrpa in both Pitjantjatjara and Kukatja, a word often translated as ‘Dreaming’. Tjukurrpa continues to influence the physical realm of people to this day. The song ‘Puranguwana’ expresses the experience of a tragic death, providing a unique perspective on the liminal state between the physical and the spirit realms. As music, it employs symbolism and allusion to evoke emotion, incite imagination, and inspire reflection on powers greater than oneself.

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8 Marie Mudgedell recalls the following men used to all sing it (names spelt according to Kukatja orthography): Paddy Paton, Gordy Tjapanangka Tarrkurl, Kapardi Tjangarti, Clancy Tjampijinpa, Spieler Ngangmarri Tjampijinpa, Boxer Milner (Milnga) Tjampijinpa, Dick Laruku Tjampijinpa, Munli (Manley), Paddy Patoon Jangala, Putin Yuyu Tjapanangka, Sandy Sturt Tjapanangka, Willy Billabong Tjapanangka, Nugget Sturt Tjapanangka, Bob Sturt Tjapanangka, Frank Clancy Jangala, Possum Tjangarto Tjilatjilngarna, Jimmy Marlaby Tjapanangka, Batlar Tjaljarri and Sam Sambo.

9 Translated from the Pitjantjatjara by Beth Sometimes. Interviewed 9 November 2017 by Myfany Turpin and interpreted by Patrick Hokey and filmed by Shane Malcahey.

10 Translated from the Pitjantjatjara by Beth Sometimes. Interviewed 9 November 2017 by Myfany Turpin and interpreted by Patrick Hokey and filmed by Shane Malcahey.

11 Tonkinson, Jigalong Mob, 85.
The singers

The three performances of ‘Puranguwana’ considered here were led by Patrick Smith and the late Jack Gordon, and involved four other Aboriginal participants. **Patrick Smith** (Tjapaljarri) is a Kukatja man affectionately known as ‘Jupiter’. Patrick was born in the 1940s on Sturt Creek Station where he worked as a stockman from a young age. He moved to Balgo with his wife Marie Mudgetell in the late 1980s so their children could attend school. **Marie Mudgetell** (Nakamarra) is a Ngardi, Jaru and Kukatja speaker also born on Sturt Creek Station. Yawulyurru is Marie’s grandfather as well as **Angie Tchooga**’s father. Both Marie and Angie were involved in translating the song. Angie, born in 1953 at Balgo and raised on Sturt Creek Station, is a Kukatja and Jaru person of the Napanangka skin group. Balgo residents, Patrick, Marie, Angie and Kukatja man **Jimmy Tchooga**, Angie’s husband, were involved in all three performances. **Jack Gordon**, a Jaru stockman, was the lead singer on two recordings. Like Pintupi man Yawalyurru, Jack Gordon was of Tjapangarti skin and also known as Yawulyurru, the Pintupi man being his namesake. Jaru woman **Marie Gordon** (Nakamarra), who is Jack Gordon’s widow, also sings on one recording. The Jaru couple resided at Bililuna community, on their country. Jack Gordon passed away in 2018.

The performances

This article draws on four recorded performances. Three are performances of the song ‘Puranguwana’ and one is of a similar song, ‘Kunytjunytju’. In 2016, Felicity Meakins and Myfany Turpin visited Balgo to see if residents could shed light on the origins of a different song known as ‘Laka’, sung by the Gurindji at Kalkaringi and learnt from Pintupi man Yawalyurru. At Balgo, people did indeed know ‘Laka’ and the discussion led Patrick Smith and Marie Mudgetell to recall another song associated with Yawalyurru, ‘Puranguwana’. This was recorded on the veranda of Angie (Yawalyurru’s daughter) and Jimmy Tchooga’s home (Figure 2). Jupiter sang and was accompanied by Angie’s husband, Jimmy Tchooga. Marie introduced the song and prompted Patrick with three verses of the song. All were visibly moved singing these songs as they thought about Yawalyurru’s untimely and lonely death.

The second recording was made two days later. Marie had arranged for the seven of us, including linguist Tom Ennever, to travel to Bililuna to visit husband and wife Jack and Marie Gordon who knew the song well (Figure 3). The singing on this occasion was vibrant and a further four verses were sung. Marie Gordon’s delicate soprano voice and Jack’s strong tenor voice added a poignancy and tenderness to the song. Both Jimmy Tchooga’s and Marie Gordon’s voices created higher-pitched harmonies, possibly unintentional. Unfortunately, a motorbike was being ridden around the community at the time, creating background noise on the recording.
Figure 2: Patrick Smith sings ‘Puranguwana’, 9 July 2016: (left) Marie Mudgedell and Patrick; (right) Jimmy Tchooga, Michael Mudgedell, Angie Tchooga, Marie Mudgedell, Patrick Smith, Myfany Turpin (left to right).
Source: Photograph by Felicity Meakins.

Figure 3: Recording ‘Puranguwana’ on the veranda of Jack and Mary Gordon’s house at Billiluna, 11 July 2016. Patrick Smith, Jack Gordon, Jimmy Tchooga (behind Jack), Marie Gordon, Marie Mudgedell and Angie Tchooga (left to right).
Source: Photograph by Tom Ennever.
Some days later, we were told that the song had been performed in 2006 at Balgo, as the opening of the 8th National Remote Indigenous Media Festival. This was filmed by the Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media organisation (PAKAM) and it is the third recording of ‘Puranguwana’ that we draw upon. On this occasion, two dances were performed. The first was danced by women as Verse 6 was sung; the second was danced by men, one of whom was Jimmy Tchooga. The singing was by a large group of people, including Jupiter and Jack Gordon. Like the 2016 performance, this was an emotional event for the family of Yawalyurru. Immediately following the performance, Yawalyurru’s daughter Angie Tchooga gave a speech in Kukatja about the tragic event that the song conveys. This was followed by an English version written by Marie Mudgedell and her sister, and read by Neil Turner. The performance and speech can be heard at ictv.com.au/video/item/867. Appendix 1 gives both an English translation of Angie’s text and a transcription of Neil’s reading of Marie’s text. It is interesting that ‘Puranguwana’ was the public entertainment song performed at the 2006 festival. It is not known why this song was performed over the raft of other songs of this genre that Moyle cites were performed at Balgo in 1981. One possibility is that very few were still known 25 years on.

We also compare ‘Puranguwana’ to a similar song recorded at Balgo in May 1981 by ethnomusicologist Richard Moyle. Both songs are of the ‘corroboree’ or public entertainment song and dance ceremonial genre. On this occasion it is referred to on the recording as ‘Kunytjunytju’ and it is said to be associated with the Jigalong area to the south. The documentation attributes it to Antbed Tjungarrayi, a Kukatja man and a traditional healer (maparn). Summaries of the four recordings are in Table 1. Note that a verse is usually sung more than once before moving on to another verse. Each rendition of a verse is referred to as a ‘song item’ (defined below under ‘formal properties of the song’), hence there are more song items than verses in any one performance. The second recording of ‘Puranguwana’ contained the most verses, seven. The other two recordings contained a subset of these verses.

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12 We thank Neil Turner from PAKAM for sharing this video. On the video, the song is titled ‘Welcome Djunba’; djunba is an Aboriginal word for the genre of public entertainment ceremony known across the Kimberley and into the Northern Territory.
13 Unfortunately, the audio of this recording is not clear and it was not possible to discern the exact verse that accompanied the second dance.
14 See Bracknell, ‘The Emotional Business of Noongar Song’, for discussion of the emotional impact of Aboriginal song, particularly in relation to history, in the south of Western Australia.
15 Translation produced by Angie Tchooga, Marie Mudgedell, Lance MacDonald and Myfany Turpin.
16 Moyle, Balgo Music.
17 On listening to this recording, Pintupi translator Lance MacDonald believed that Kunytjunytju was likely to be the name of a woman. He translates what one of the men said as ‘The husband is here and Kunytjunytju is over here. Kunytjunytju went around and around and went in here. Kunytjunytju is a woman.’ (Aus 650, 15–25 seconds).
Table 1: The recordings considered in this article.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Recording date</th>
<th>Singers</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>No. of verses</th>
<th>No. of song items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Puranguwana'</td>
<td>9 July 2016</td>
<td>PS*, MM, AT, JT</td>
<td>Balgo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 July 2016</td>
<td>PS, MG, JG*, MM, AT, JT</td>
<td>Biliwuna</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>PS, MG, MM, JG*, AT, JT + Balgo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Kunytjunytju'</td>
<td>May 1981</td>
<td>6 men (unidentified)</td>
<td>Balgo</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of song items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors.

In 2019, the late Bai-Bai Napangardi referred to Verse 1 of ‘Puranguwana’ as Kunytjuru a word meaning ‘smoke’. This is probably a variant of the song’s title ‘Kunytjunytju’. Given that the singers of ‘Kunytjunytju’ were born much earlier than today’s singers of ‘Puranguwana’, if one song did give rise to the other, we suggest ‘Kunytjunytju’ would have been the earlier song. Both are entertainment songs that were shared between groups, so it is also possible that they were known widely.

The subject matter of the song

A number of classical Aboriginal songs that refer to recent events have been documented. Many of these songs refer to encounters with the ‘rapid changes associated with the arrival of Europeans and colonisation’. In contrast, ‘Puranguwana’ reflects on a purely Aboriginal experience. Although we found no trace of it in historical records, the story of how Yawalyurru perished in the desert is itself a newsworthy story. Marie and Angie gave the following account of this event in 2016:

Yawalyurru passed away tragically when he and Angie’s brother and her niece (both children then) attempted to walk from Sturt Creek Station to Gordon Downs Station to meet his brother, Wirtiwtiri. They were unable to find water and there was a hot wind so Yawalyurru left Yinpapi and the children at a tree and instructed them to bury themselves in the sand to avoid dehydrating. He then set out to find water, making his way to a known permanent water source … Sadly, he perished near Nana Rockhole, which was en route to Gordon Downs homestead, before anyone could find him. Fortunately, the

19 To the best of our knowledge, all the senior singers with whom Richard Moyle worked with have passed away.
others were saved by an Aboriginal man and his wife who were walking from Flora Valley. They gave them water to drink and douse themselves in and took word to Sturt Creek homestead. The station owners then came and brought them back to Sturt Creek in a vehicle. Yawalyurru was buried where he was found.22

In the 2006 performance Angie gives an emotional account of this event, relating it to relatives in the audience. It includes how Yawalyurru’s spirit returned to his Pintupi country. A translation of this narrative is given in Appendix 1.

Like many Aboriginal songs, the verses of ‘Puranguwana’ do not so much tell a story but punctuate points in this tragic event. Each verse is like a snapshot of a moment when the protagonist saw, thought, felt, heard or did something of significance. For the knowledgeable listener, many of the verses are associated with particular places where an event occurred.

The language of the verses

The language of the song is a potpourri of vocabulary from Western Desert varieties as well as Jaru, Walmajarri, Warlpiri and Ngardi. The title, for example, ‘Puranguwana’, is literally purangu ‘sun, heat, hot weather’ in Ngardi, Warlpiri, Walmajarri; and -wana ‘through’ in Kukatja, Martu Wangka, Ngardi and Warlpiri. These words may also exist in other languages, but our analysis is limited to the existing dictionaries of the region that we could access.23

Nevertheless, the vocabulary most attested in the song, as well as the grammar, is Western Desert. This is noteworthy given that Yawalyurru was on Jaru country at the time of his death, and it was a Jaru man who received the song. It is difficult to identify any single Western Desert variety that the song is in. Speakers we worked with often said many of the words were also ‘old Pintupi’ or ‘new Kukatja’. Frequently these observations were not commensurate with the existing resources. This could be for two reasons: first, the existing resources are limited; and second, when it comes to song, native speakers avoid dialect affiliation more than they do for speech.24 We suggest that ‘Puranguwana’ can be thought of as a transnational Western Desert song in terms of its lyrics.

21 In 2019 Angie Tchooga clarified that it was a policeman and the Flora Valley Station manager who brought the family back to Sturt Creek Station.
22 Turpin and Meakins, Songs from the Stations, 34–35.
23 See Appendix 2 for a list of linguistic sources and the language abbreviations.
24 Turpin and Green, ‘Trading in Terms’.
The provenance of the words in the song is shown in Appendix 2. In the morphological glossing of the song, text is underlined when no speech equivalents could be found in existing dictionaries. On the whole, the lyrics of ‘Puranguwana’ are quite transparent in comparison to many other Aboriginal songs, meaning that Kukatja and Pintupi speakers were able to identify speech equivalents and assign meanings to these words. People did sometimes differ, however, on the overall interpretation of a verse. This is not unusual, as Aboriginal song texts often use non-specific vocabulary enabling broad or ambiguous layers of meanings, some of which are only accessible with specialist knowledge.

**Formal properties of the song**

Each of the seven verses of ‘Puranguwana’ contain a single line of rhythmic text, most often 21 syllables. In performance, a verse repeats four or five times until the end of the longer melodic contour. This continuous stretch of singing of the repeating verse usually lasts about 30 seconds, and is what musicologists refer to as a ‘song item’. The song items of each verse usually begin at the same place of the verse, with the exception of the first song item of Verse 2. In the written linear representations of the verse, we use the most frequent starting point as the beginning of a verse.

All seven verses consist of a 14-beat rhythmic text comprising 19–21 syllables/rhythmic notes, with a preference for 21 (Table 2). The rhythm is syllable driven, meaning that the number of notes and syllables in any given text are the same. Six different rhythmic patterns are used for the verses, and each verse only ever has one rhythmic setting. Note that pattern 4 is the same sequence as pattern 3, but starting from bar 3. The similarity can be heard in performance, as a song item is a repeating rhythmic text; imagining the rhythm as a circle makes this clearer.

The six rhythmic patterns are built on three rhythmic cells: a two-, three- and four-note cell (Table 3). Variation in the duration of these notes occurs in certain bars of some verses. The variants are shown in brackets in Table 3. For example, the two-note cell is two notes of near equal length in some verse final bars (e.g. Verse 7, bar 7).

26 Ellis, *Aboriginal Music*.
27 This contrasts with the more common central Australian verse form where a verse has two lines (A and B) that repeat in an AABB pattern. Yeoh and Turpin, ‘An Aboriginal Women’s Song from Arrwek’.
29 This contrasts with many other types of central Australian songs, where a song item can start at different points in the verse. Turpin, ‘Form and Meaning of Akwelye’.
30 Ellis, ‘Rhythmic Analysis of Aboriginal Syllabic Songs’.
Table 2: The rhythmic patterns of the seven verses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhythm</th>
<th>No. syllables</th>
<th>Verse id.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4, 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors.

Table 3: The three rhythmic cells with variants in brackets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beats/notes</th>
<th>2 notes</th>
<th>3 notes</th>
<th>4 notes</th>
<th>Total no. cells</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-beats</td>
<td>⚡️ ⚡️</td>
<td>⚡️ ⚡️</td>
<td>⚡️ ⚡️</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The variants diminish the distinction between long and short notes rather than reassigning shorter to longer notes or vice versa.
Source: Authors.

As with many Aboriginal songs, the number of syllables in a word determines the number of rhythmic note attacks. With different combinations of the cells, it is possible to set any word rhythmically and have it coincide with a bar boundary. Words tend to end with a long note, thus the four-note rhythmic cell does not usually coincide with the end of a linguistic phrase, whereas the two-note and three-note rhythmic cells do. There is usually melodic ornamentation on the word-final syllables set to long notes; for example, *ngarrima*, *ngarana*, *wana* and *kuturna*.

The seven verses of ‘Puranguwana’

The seven verses of ‘Puranguwana’ do not appear to have any sequential order, as the multiple performances reveal. Below we present the verses in the order that they were sung on 9 July 2016 followed by the additional verses sung on 11 July 2016. On some occasions after singing a verse, one of the singers quoted what the protagonist Yawalyurru was thinking or doing. We introduce each verse with such a quote. These small explanations are common in performance and elsewhere they have been referred to as ‘song expansions’. 31

31 Turpin, ‘Form and Meaning of Akwelye’.
Our analysis considers the words of the verse and the underlying rhythm associated with each syllable. This broad rhythm is not so much a transcription, but an analysis derived from many repetitions of the verse (which is what occurs in performance), extrapolating away from small differences and representing the category as a short or long note. In the presentation of each verse the top row is the rhythm, the second row the percussive beats, the third row the sung text, the fourth row a linguistic analysis and the fifth row a linguistic gloss. The phrase marks denote rhythmic patterns that end on a long note, coinciding with linguistic phrases. These are either, four, six or 10 beat units. Where possible, a free translation is given in the bottom row, as in Verse 1. The meaning of the linguistic glosses is provided in Appendix 2.

**Verse 1**

*Puyu, too much smoke now (Jack Gordon, 11 July 2016)*

This verse is about Yawalyurru’s spirit going back home to his Pintupi homelands south-east of Balgo. According to Jack Gordon, Yawalyurru’s spirit in the sky thinks to himself, ‘Too much smoke now, I’m going back home, back to my country’. Jimmy explains that he flies back to country, making it clear that this is a spirit journey. This is echoed in Jupiter’s explanation of the song three years later, ‘I’m going back home. Spirit going back to my country ngurrara kuturna’ (15 April 2019). The song can connote how the protagonist’s need to go home made him unafraid of walking through smoke and fire, reminding us of the non-corporeal nature of the spirit world.

The verse begins with the phrase *puyu-larn-ngarrima* ‘smoke-through-was lying’.

While the song may refer to smoke from a fire, it may also connote what some Aboriginal people describe as a visual phenomenon that can accompany death as the

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33 Suggested by Western Desert interpreter Lance MacDonald, pers. comm., 12 October 2019.

34 The ending –*larni* may signal non-identity with main clause arguments. In Ngardi it occurs on visual substances that occupy the air, such as light, dark or smoke. Cataldi, *Dictionary of Ngardi*, 326; cf. Ennever, ‘Nominal and Pronominal Morphology of Ngardi’, 127.
spirit leaves the earth and rises into the sky. Note that although the verbal inflection -ma is conventionally a past-habitual marker in many Western Desert languages, the singer’s translations of the verse are all in the present continuous. This suggests that -ma may be solely aspectual rather than temporal, at least in song. The second clause is puyu-puyu-wana tjalka-ma ngurrara=kutu=rna, literally, ‘through the thick smoke I was returning to my country’. The verb tjalkama means ‘send, let go’ (K, Wang, Warn, M). While the meaning ‘return’ is not attested in the dictionaries, perhaps this meaning pertains to when the subject is a spirit and the construction is understood as having an unspecified subject – for example, ‘I/it (e.g. death) sent my spirit’. This fits with how the protagonist was driven to return home. An alternative account is that tjalkama ‘return’ could also mean ‘to know’ (K). Tjalkama ‘return’ occurs in two other verses of the song, as discussed below. The word ngurrara ‘one’s own country’ is widely attested (K, Wlm, Ng, Wrlp) and its meaning in the song is compatible with an explanation in the Warlpiri Dictionary: ‘Ngurrara … is like the place where they (person or animal) were born and grew up, they are from that country’.³⁵

VERSE 2

*Kawarn ngarama* standing around looking for water

(Patrick Smith, 9 July 2016)

\[\text{I don’t know what to do, my head is spinning in this hot wind}\]

In this verse, Yawalyurru is losing his mind from thirst. He is said to be on Sturt Creek at 26 Mile Bore where there is a windmill and two tanks. He went ‘round and ‘round looking for water, but the tank was dry. Marie explains how ‘he is lost’ in this verse. A big, hot whirly-wind came and Marie and Jupiter speculate that Yawalyurru must have grabbed onto the tank to steady himself. The text includes a borrowing from English, ‘willy-willy’, although this itself is a borrowing from Yindjibarndi, a Western Australian language. The word kankarra ‘above’ is used figuratively to refer to ‘head’, kankarrarna wilayi yana, ‘The top of me is spinning’, alluding to the initial effects of dehydration.³⁶ *Kawarn ngarama* is said to mean ‘standing, going ‘round

³⁵ Laughren, *Warlpiri to English*, in press.
³⁶ Marie Mudgedell, 2017.
and 'round', as if the protagonist is thinking ‘What am I doing wandering around, am I lost?’ One of five song items of this verse start with the phrase *willi-willi-puru*, the other four begin as written in Verse 2 above.

**Verse 3**

*I bin see'em man* (Patrick Smith, 9 July 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>nyakura</th>
<th>kama-</th>
<th>pilpara</th>
<th>wurrarna</th>
<th>nyangama</th>
<th>purnturna</th>
<th>tjanampa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nya-ku-la</td>
<td>travel-PST:IMPF</td>
<td>pilpara-wurrna=rna</td>
<td>ashes-COM=1SG.S</td>
<td>see-PST:IMPF</td>
<td>man=1SG.S=3PL.DAT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Looking out while travelling home, I see relatives covered in ashes’

In this verse, Yawalyurru's spirit looks down and sees a man in mourning covered in ashes. ‘He was looking down … I can see that man with ashes … laying near the ashes, sorry side, they got that news now, he passed away. They were all crying.’

Marie Mudgedell explains that he sees his brother, Kapardi, who is sleeping by the fire, all covered in ashes. ‘Another old man down there, from the sky. He was sad now. He rubs himself with ashes.’ Jack, representing Yawalyurru, exclaims ‘“Hello my brother!” He was laying down (in mourning).’ Jupiter expands on this, ‘*Purnturna tjanampa nykurla tjalkama* ‘I bin see ’em man, my brother, paint all over.’ We might suppose that Kapardi is mourning the death of his brother Yawalyurru.

The verse starts with a serial verb construction *nyakula tjalkama* ‘looking while returning’. It connotes an image of a spirit flying back to their own country looking out down below. This phrase is also encountered in the song ‘*Kunytjunytju*’, Verses 1 and 8 (Appendix 2). The phrase *pilpara-wurrna-rna* is said to mean ‘man covered in ashes’ (‘paint all over’), however, it is not clear what *pilpara* is – it was only encountered in R. Moyle's fieldnotes in a song text in which it was said to mean ‘decoration’. The final phrase, *puntu=rna=tjanampa* ‘I (look for) men/kin’. *Puntu* ‘man’ (M) is also said to be old Pintupi; while in Warlpiri it means ‘kin, mate’.

**Verse 4**

*See’em his own son* (Patrick Smith, 11 July 2016)

According to Jupiter, Yawalyurru was walking around 20 Mile Bore perishing, looking for water when he saw his own son in a vision. As in the previous verse, this verse begins with the serial verb construction *nyakula tjalkama* ‘looking while

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38 AIATSIS MS 5183/1/2, a485151b3s3i3pt1a, p. 66.
returning’. We can imagine his spirit’s bird’s-eye view of the physical world looking down and seeing his own son (katja waltja-rna-tja ‘my own son’ also occurs in Verses 2 and 3 of another ceremony of the tjulturpa genre).\(^{39}\) Marie and Jupiter say that wirnta-wirnta refers to a woman’s dancing stick, which women held in the air while dancing. They also described it as ‘bamboo stick’ (15 April 2019). Note wirnta ‘sharp stick, fighting spear’ (P, M, P/Y) and in its reduplicated form can refer to ceremonial decorations and a particular ceremony. For the Warlpiri, ‘wirnta-wirnta is performed by men wearing two pointed decorations on their heads and white body decoration … a ritual belonging to Japangardi-Japanangka subsection’.\(^{40}\) In ceremony, people are transformed; for some listeners, there is a connotation that Yawalyurru is seeing his son transformed. In addition, we see a symbolic association that Yawalyurru himself is undergoing a transformation from the realm of the living to that of the dead. This verse begins with the same phrase as that of Verse 3. The word nyangama in bar 5 is also the same in both verses.

Jack Gordon says, ‘This is a story about my brother [Yawalyurru], at Sturt Creek Station … Later he found his camp … Make a bit of a hole on the fire.’ The song is said to be about an event that happened at 20 Mile Yard on Sturt Creek Station where there is a stockyard. Yawalyurru was looking at his son near some bushes. The first phrase is yiwarranga ‘a vertical path’, which was likened to a ‘super

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\(^{40}\) Laughren, *Warlpiri to English*, in press.
highway’. The next phrase has *kankarra* ‘above’, which connotes the spirit realm above appearing to open up. The final word of this phrase is not known but appears to mean ‘surprise’ or ‘sparkle’. The phrase refers to something like a path going up with an opening or tear at the top, sparkling with light from above. The final phrase refers to going back down. Above and below are often used to describe the worlds of the spirits and the living. One person likened the way the spirit travels to the way that turtles travel underwater and come up for air and then go back down. Spirits observe or do something in the physical realm, and then return to travel underground. Each time the spirit pops up, it will be a new song text and dance.  

**Verse 6**

```plaintext
kumpiranga rama
patiyirla kurrpai
kurrpirnai yawalyirri ngarna
```

Jupiter provides the following explanation of this verse: ‘What am I doing standing around, looking for water. I’m lost! I’m a long way from my wife and kids!’ The first phrase is *kumpira ngara-ma*, which is ‘standing around trying not to be seen; trying not to be conspicuous’. The next word, *patirirla*, is said to refer to a light, thin stick, which could be used as a spear or a dancing stick. Marie Mudgedell describes this as *tatji-tatji*. Note that in the 2006 performance this verse was sung to accompanying men’s dancing, all of whom held spears.

Marie states that *kurrpi-kurrpi-ru* means ‘sprinkling water on himself’ and she notes he might have had a little bit left. Traditionally, Kukatja people sprinkled water on themselves when hot; as well as on burning green plants to make a healing smoke for the sick. It is also possible that he is performing a ceremony, mimicking a sprinkling motion, as if he is revealing himself through performing ceremony. The final word, spoken as *yawalirringkarna*, was said to mean ‘grieve’ (K) on one
occasion. Marie suggested that he might be feeling sorry for himself. On another occasion Jupiter noted the word’s similarity to the protagonist’s name, Yawalyurru, and Marie suggested that Yawalyurru might be talking to himself.

Verse 7

Dancing one that one, all the man can dance (Patrick Smith, 11 July 2016)

This has an associated dance performed by men, which is the dance that can be seen on the ICTV website (see Appendix 1). Jupiter describes this as a happy song. It is possible that this reflects one meaning of the word in this song, ngarrurta. In some languages this is a distressing emotion while in others it is akin to joy. Some speakers translated it as ‘rushed’, which is associated with a strong emotion that stops you from acting before you think. The last phrase means ‘I hit the rock’, which may have caused sparks and a flash (pinpangu). As in Verse 2, the exact form of the suffix on the verb ‘go’ is not clear as it only occurs on a long note and is subject to diphthongisation. Note that Marie Gordon does a short-long clap accompaniment while Jack does an even clap accompaniment.

Musical and textual similarities to the song ‘Kunytjunytju’

‘Kunytjunytju’, a song recorded by ethnomusicologist Richard Moyle at Balgo in 1981, sounds remarkably similar to ‘Puranguwana’. This song warrants full consideration as the subject of another paper; here we only summarise its similarities to ‘Puranguwana’, as these suggest a similar creative force. The song ‘Kunytjunytju’ also refers to the experience of entering the spirit world and seeing one’s son, a whirlwind and the hot sun. It has eight verses, and all share the seven-bar and 14-beat verse structure of ‘Puranguwana’ and have a similar melodic structure.47 Below is the first verse that was sung in 1981.

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47 A total of 17 song items (18 minutes) are on this recording, Aus 650. This recording is held at AIATSIS and the University of Auckland.
Verse 1 of ‘Kunytjunytju’

The handsome, well-muscled man’s spirit saw a turlku [song] in his stomach and followed it.48

Note the similar vocabulary in Verse 1 of ‘Kunytjunytju’ to that in ‘Puranguwana’: nyakurla tjalka- ‘while travelling I see’ (‘Puranguwana’ Verses 3 and 4). Other words that occur in verses of both songs are ngarrurta ‘(an emotion)’, kankarra ‘high’ (‘Puranguwana’ Verses 2, 5 and ‘Kunytjunytju’ Verse 6), winta-winta ‘ceremony’ (‘Puranguwana’ Verse 4 and ‘Kunytjunytju’ Verse 4) and even entire rhythmic text phrases such as katja waltja natja ‘I saw my own son’ (‘Puranguwana’ Verse 4 and ‘Kunytjunytju’ Verse 7).

Both songs share many musical features. Neither have line repetition within the verse structure and the alignment of rhythmic text to melody never varies. As in the performances of ‘Puranguwana’, there is only one song item where the singers start elsewhere in the verse structure: one of the four song items of Verse 1 shown above. There are also similarities in the melody in both songs. This is illustrated in Figure 4 that compares the melodic descent of a song item of ‘Puranguwana’ (Verse 2) with a song item of ‘Kunytjunytju’ (Verse 1). In the musical notation in Figure 4, the lines represent a sliding (portamento) off the main pitch. In both song items, the melody hovers around a 6th (A♭) and 7th (B♭) above the tonic (C) and descends to the tonic over the space of a single iteration of the verse (line one). The second iteration of the verse centres around the tonic (line two) and has the characteristic step up to the second pitch (D), marked with a circle. This pitch movement is summarised in Figure 5, and expressed in terms of intervallic structure in Figure 6.

48 Free translation from R. Moyle fieldnotes, MS 5132/1/2, a485151b1s3i1a, p. 51, AIATSIS. Textual and rhythmic analysis by the authors.
(a) ‘Puranguwana’ (Verse 2, song item 1, bars 1–15; 11 July 2016 performance)

(b) ‘Kunytjunytju’ (Verse 1, song item 4, bars 1–14)

Figure 4: A comparison of the main melodic descent in a verse from each of the two songs.
Both song items have been transposed down an interval of a minor 3rd to C for ease of comparison. Boxed numbers indicate iterations of the text.
Source: Authors.

(a) Puranguwana pitch A b - B b - A b - B b - G G - b - F - E - D - D b - C
(b) Kunytjunytju pitch A b - B b - A b - B b - A b - F - D - C

(a) Puranguwana intervals 6 b - 7 b - 6 b - 7 b - 5 b - 5 b - 4 - 3 - 2 - 2 b - 1
(b) Kunytjunytju intervals 6 b - 7 b - 6 b - 7 b - 6 b - 4 - 2 - 1

Figure 5: A summary of the main melodic descent (line 1) of the two song items (Figure 4) in terms of pitch and intervals of the two verses
Source: Authors.
Both song items have an intervallic range of a minor 7th (Figure 6).

The last melodic descent of a song item in both ‘Kunytjunytju’ and ‘Puranguwana’ descends to the lower tonic, an octave below where the first descent ends. Figure 7 shows these descents in the same two song items shown in Figure 4.

![Figure 6: Intervalllic range of a minor 7th.](image)

Source: Authors.

(a) Last melodic descent of ‘Puranguwana’ (Verse 2, song item 1, bars 29–37; 11 July 2016 performance)

![Figure 7: A comparison of the last melodic descents of the song items in Figure 4 (transposed down an interval of a perfect 4th to C for ease of comparison). These end an octave below (C2) where the previous descent ends (C3).](image)

Source: Authors.

(b) Last melodic descent of ‘Kunytjunytju’ (Verse 1, song item 4, bars 28–36)

Both ‘Puranguwana’ and ‘Kunytjunytju’ song items have an intervallic range of a 14th (Figure 8).

![Figure 8: Intervalllic range of a 14th.](image)

Source: Authors.
The similarities between these two songs was posed to Marie and Jupiter. The couple had not heard ‘Kunytjunytju’ before and they regarded it as a different song to ‘Puranguwana’. This assertion is perhaps not surprising given the remarkable stability of Aboriginal rhythmic song texts over time. The textual similarities between the two songs may be due to this genre, *tjulpurrpa*, having a particular theme. According to Moyle an ‘apparent feature of *tjulpurrpa* is songs describing the acquisition process itself’. In 2019, however, authors Meakins and Turpin visited the late Bai-Bai Napangardi at Kapalulangu, the old women’s home at Balgo. Bai-Bai joined in the singing of a verse of ‘Puranguwana’, and then referred to it as *kunytjuru* ‘smoke’. Bai-Bai worked closely with Richard Moyle and was very much part of Balgo ceremonial life at that time. It is possible that ‘Puranguwana’ could be ‘Kunytjunytju’ rediscovered, ‘shorn of [its] historical references’. While not everyone regards these as the same song, the similarities suggest a clear musical and textual influence.

**Conclusion**

Yawulyurru Tjapangarti was an important songman, both in life and in death. In life, his fame extended beyond his immediate family and community. Gurindji elders some 1,000 kilometres away, who never met him, still sing his songs and speak highly of his musical talents. In death, a new song emerged from his creative energies, ‘Puranguwana’. The tragic circumstance of Yawalyurru’s death is remembered with each performance. The unusual transparency of the lyrics and the use of first person means the confusion and agony of his death is experienced first-hand by the singers. As sung by Jack Gordon and various family members who knew him, ‘Puranguwana’ shows how tragedy is remembered and grief is re-experienced. While we might think of familiar English songs that describe mourning, knowing that ‘Puranguwana’ is composed by the person watching his own mourning rituals adds a reflexive stance that is widespread in Aboriginal songs. The ‘emotional business of song’ is not only due to the subject matter, but also because of the participant’s relationship as kin and descendants of the song-maker and protagonist. The emotional business is also heightened in a world view where classical song is the means by which the living connect with their kin, both the deceased and the living in their fellow performers.

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49 The couple did not move to Balgo until the mid to late 1980s.
53 For example, Son House’s ‘Death Letter Blues’ (1965): ‘Looked like there was 10,000 people standin’ round the buryin’ ground / I didn’t know I loved her ‘til they laid her down’. We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing us to this song.
54 Bracknell, ‘The Emotional Business of Noongar Song’.
The similarities between ‘Puranguwana’ and ‘Kunytjunytju’ highlight the multicultural nature of Aboriginal creative practice, bringing music and language from different groups together. They illustrate how Aboriginal songs can be rediscovered at a later date relating to a different context. Both songs are from the perspective of a spirit travelling in the sky, observing scenes in the corporeal world below involving his family as well as himself. Both songs use vocabulary associated with Aboriginal perceptions of the liminal state between life and death, such as smoke (puyu), whirlly-winds (wili-wili), home (ngurrara), above (kankarra) and below (kaninytjarra). Fabb suggests that liminal states have a particular and profound aesthetic effect in verbal arts. The verses do not so much tell a sequential story, but rather are like vignettes inspired by a set of still photographs that could perhaps be ordered by the location of their scene. Pintupi woman Linda Anderson likens such songs to a picture book, with each page a new story.

Oral history and the linguistic transparency of the song show that ‘Puranguwana’ came into being at a known time in the past, unlike many other Aboriginal songs whose origins are assigned to the distant past. ‘Puranguwana’ demonstrates how songs received in recent times can be a mnemonic for historical events, people and places; while at the same time instilling cultural beliefs and values, such as those relating to life, death, kinship and country. All of this is crafted in an artistic package that has the power to transport listeners back to a time and place and inspire emotions. With increased community access to recordings, such as through the efforts of organisations like PAKAM, it is hoped Aboriginal people will continue to receive songs that reflect their unique perspective on human experience.

Acknowledgements

We thank the following people for singing and sharing their knowledge about this song with us: Patrick Smith, Jack Gordon†, Marie Gordon, Jimmy Tchooga and Mark Moora. We also thank Neil Turner of Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media (PAKAM) and Richard Moyle of the University of Auckland for permission to access archival recordings made at Balgo; Zohl de Ishtar for welcoming us to the home of Kapalulangu; linguists Tom Ennever and Luis Miguel Rojas Berscia, whose residence at Balgo lightened the load of fieldwork. We also thank Pintupi interpreter Lance MacDonald for insights on translation. We thank colleagues at the Australian Languages Workshop 2020 and the Sydney Conservatorium of Music Work in Progress Group for providing feedback on earlier versions of this article; as well as two anonymous reviewers whose detailed and insightful comments greatly helped us improve this article.

56 Fabb, ‘Two Routes to Epiphany’.
57 Linda Anderson to Author 1, 23 May 2018.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0:00</td>
<td>Men and women singing Verse 6 [m-pura50], women dancing (7 song items)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:01</td>
<td>Men and women singing an indistinguishable verse (1 song item). Men dancing holding spears. Jack Gordon can be seen wearing a red waistband with his whole body covered in white ochre leading the dancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:34</td>
<td>Men and women singing Verse 7 [m-pura51] (1 song item)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:09–9:40</td>
<td>Kukatja story told by Angie Tchooga. The English translation here was provided by Marie Mudgedell and Angie Tchooga to Myf Turpin in April 2019.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That old man had three or four wives. He was travelling from Old Balgo Mission (Jalyuwarn) to Sturt Creek with his three wives. He was staying at Sturt Creek. He had sons and daughters with him. Then I was born and that old man was still there at Sturt Creek.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One day he got ready to go walking to Gordon Downs. They were travelling, a whole group of them, to Gordon Downs. That old woman (one of the wives) and the rest of them, walked to a place called 26. Then they got to 20 Mile and they saw a mirage like a water. They were getting happy for water (the two children and Angie's mum). Yawalyurru carried with him two buckets. He had a yoke and two buckets I wasn't there, I was too little. Another family grew me up. My old man and the old lady were digging so that they had a cool place to lie down while Yawalyurru looked for water. He told them to cover themselves with cold sand so that they didn't dehydrate while he went looking for water. He looked but there was no water. He saw another rockhole near Gordon Downs but it was empty. He was dehydrated near a manakiji (conkerberry) tree, halfway to Gordon Downs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He was dehydrated and dizzy. He passed away and he went back home to Papurn. And that other Tjapangarti is looking after that song now. He gave it to all those old men at Sturt Creek. My dad knew all those old men really well. And he gave them this song in a dream so that they could continue it. He went back to Paapu(?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Lexicon of the song

For ease of comparison the spelling for all words follows that used for Kukatja.\(^{58}\)

Symbols

1. Underlining means that the word is either: a) a non-attested meaning of a word in the dictionaries (e.g. tjalka-); b) a hypothesised dictionary equivalent rather than coinciding with any translation given by the singers (e.g. tingari); or c) a root of the form in the song that occurs in a wider range of dialects (e.g. nya-).

2. Indents signal alternatives to the proposed speech equivalent.

-\textit{larni} ‘obv’ (Ng, Warl)
-\textit{ma} ‘pst.impf’ (K, P, Ng, Wang)
-\textit{wana} ‘perl’ (K, M)
-\textit{tju} ‘1sg.obj/poss’ (K, M), ‘erg/inst’ (K, M, Wang); ‘excl’ (M)
\textit{kaninytjarra} ‘below, under’ (K, P)
\textit{kanka} ‘above’ (K, M, P, Py, Ng, Warn)
\textit{katja} ‘son, sister’s son’ (K, M, P, Py, Wang)
\textit{kawarn} ‘mad, forgetful’ (K, M)
\textit{kawan} ‘forgetful’ (Wang)
\textit{kawany} ‘ignorant’ (Ng); ‘silly’ (Walm)
\textit{kumpi-} ‘concealed, out of site’ (Py, K)
\textit{kurrpi-rnu} ‘sprinkle-pst’ (K, M, P, Wang)
\textit{kurrpi-kurrpi-} ‘sprinkle’ (WD)
-\textit{kutu} ‘all’ (Py, M)
-\textit{kurti} ‘all’ (Warn)
\textit{ngarri-} ‘lie’ (K, M, Wang)
\textit{ngara-} ‘stand’ (K, M, P, Py, Wang)
-\textit{ngkun} ‘2sg.ref’ (K)
\textit{ngka-rna} ‘adj-1sg.s’ (K)
\textit{ngurrara} ‘home’ (K, M, Ng, Walm, Warl)
\textit{nya-la} ‘see-ser’ (K, Ngaa, Wang)
\textit{nya-nga} ‘watch out for, look for’ (‘see-pot’) (Wang, Ng, K, Py)

\(^{58}\) Valiquette, Kukatja to English Dictionary.
‘PURANGUWANA’ (‘PERISHING IN THE SUN’)

nya-  ‘see’ (J, K, M, Ng, Ngaa, P, PY, Wang, Warn)

ngarrurda  ‘strong emotion, grief stricken, afraid, distressed’ (Warl)

ngarrurda  ‘happy’ (J)

ngarruta  ‘joy, happy, content’ (P, K)

ngayulurna  ‘1sg.erg-1sg.s’ (K)

patarla  ‘fragile, light’ (K)

patiri  ‘protruding’ (Warl)

pati-  ‘closed, blocked’ (PY)

pilpara  ‘ashes’ (MM); ‘decoration’ (R. Moyle fieldnotes, MS 5132)

pinpa-ngu  ‘flash, blink’ (K, PY, P) ‘-pst’(K)

pungu-ngku  ‘hit-pst-adj’ (K)

pu-  ‘hit’ (WD)

punktu  ‘man’ (M, K); ‘person, Aboriginal person’ (K); ‘friend, kin, mate’ (W)

purli  ‘rock, stone, hill’ (P, K, Warn, Wang, PY)

-puru  ‘amid’ (K, M, Wang)

puru  ‘again’ (P); ‘out of sight’ (Warl)

puyu  ‘smoke’ (K, P, Wang, Warn, Ng)

-rna  ‘1sg.s’ (K, M, Ng, PY, Wang, Warn, Warl)

tirrinykati  ‘rip, tear’ (K)

tirriny(pa)  ‘surprise’ (K, P)

tingari  ‘Dreamtime heros’ (K)

tjalka-  vi  ‘know’ (K)

tjalka-  vt  ‘send, let go’ (K, Wang, Warn, M)

-tjalka  ‘inchoative’ (PY)

waltja  ‘family, relative’ (K, P, Wang, PY); ‘self, oneself’ (M)

-wana  ‘perl’ (K, Ng, Wang, Warn, PY)

wana-  ‘follow’ (Warn)

wilayi  ‘circling, around’ (Ng, J, G)

winta-winta  ‘shavings’ (R. Moyle, MS 5132/1/2, a485151b1s3i1a-p51); ‘decoration for ceremony’ (M)
wirnta-wirnta ‘name of a specific ceremony once known at Balgo’ (Moyle, *Balgo Music*, 90); ‘name of specific ritual belonging to Tjapangarti-Tjapanangka subsection’ (Warl) ‘…wirntawirnta is performed by men wearing two pointed decorations on their heads and white body decoration.’ (Laughren, in press)
wirnta ‘hunting spear’ (WD)
-wurru ‘commitative’ (Ng)
wurru ‘backway’ (K)
-wurra ‘towards’ (J)
yani–yana ‘go’ (WD)
yawiyirriwa ‘grieve’ (K)
Yawalyurru (personal name)
yiwarra ‘road, route, path’ (K, M, P, Ngaa, Warl, WD)

Language abbreviations and source material

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<td>Warmman</td>
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<td>WD</td>
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<td>Wm</td>
<td>Walmatjarri</td>
<td>Richards and Hudson, <em>Walmajarri–English Dictionary</em></td>
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‘Richard Moyle; Field Work 1974–1982’, MS 5183. AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), Canberra.

Other sources


‘PURANGUWANA’ (‘PERISHING IN THE SUN’)


Turpin, Myfany. ‘Form and Meaning of Akwelye, a Kaytetye Women’s Song Series from Central Australia’. PhD thesis, Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney, 2005.


Gwoja Tjungurrayi as ‘One Pound Jimmy’: Aboriginalia in the post

Paige Gleeson

Abstract: Postage stamps act as ‘tiny transmitters’ of nationalist and colonial ideology due both to their capacity for movement and as sites of official, state-sanctioned visual propaganda. The representation of Aboriginal people and motifs on stamps in mid-twentieth-century Australia are visual clues that reference shifts in thinking about nation-building from the interwar to the postwar period. Stamps provide a concentrated visual snapshot of the tense and unstable positioning of Aboriginal people both within settler imagination and the Australian nation during this period of change. Changing understandings of the place of Aboriginal people within Australia resulted in the proliferation of visual representations that drew upon earlier colonial visual language, and hence images of Aboriginal Australians form their own moving historical trajectory, as mobile as the postage stamps on which they came to feature. This article seeks to trace the genealogy of this representational flux through analysis of the images of Aboriginality that featured on postage stamps, as well as exploring the unique interaction of government and popular influence on the postage stamp as form. It uncovers a previously unknown image of the historically significant Aboriginal Australian man Gwoja Tjungurrayi, whose likeness features on the Australian two dollar coin.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that this paper includes the names and images of people who have died.
Figure 1: The 1950 ‘Aborigine’ 8½d postage stamp featuring Gwoja Tjungurrayi. Designer and engraver: Frank Manley.
Source: Courtesy of Australia Post.
Every modern Australian has encountered Gwoja Tjungurrayi’s image. The nameless Aboriginal man engraved on our two dollar coin was based on a drawing of the Warlpiri-Annmatyerr man. Tjungurrayi was catapulted to an unlikely fame when he became the first living Australian, settler or Aboriginal, to be featured on a postage stamp. From 1950 to 1966, 99 million stamps featuring Tjungurrayi’s portrait were sold, and he became known to Australia and the world as ‘One Pound Jimmy’. Despite being one of the most sighted people in Australian history, there is little popular knowledge of his life. The only text on the stamp featuring Tjungurrayi’s image, his sole identifier, is the word ‘Aborigine’. Tjungurrayi provoked settler fascination and became an internationally recognised national symbol, all while remaining almost entirely invisible.

The use of Aboriginal motifs as iconography on government-issued stamps prior to the use of Tjungurrayi’s image in 1950 was rare. Only four stamps that feature Aboriginal themes were released between 1934 and 1950, the first of their kind. The timing of the emergence of Aboriginal themes in Australian cultural nationalism in the interwar and immediate postwar period is curious, and represents a revival of settler Australian interest in Aboriginal Australians. Between Federation in 1901 and the 1930s, Aboriginal people were conspicuously absent in the search for a distinctly Australian national visual iconography. This sudden emergence raises some important questions, namely why representations of Aboriginal people and motifs became so popular in mid-century Australia, and how Tjungurrayi’s image in particular came to resonate in settler Australia. As visual evidence, stamps provide a concentrated snapshot of the tense and unstable positioning of Aboriginal people within both the settler imagination and the Australian nation during this period.

As understandings of the place of Aboriginal people within Australia shifted over the twentieth century, a proliferation of visual representations emerged that drew upon earlier colonial visual language, and hence images of Aboriginal Australians formed their own moving historical trajectory, as mobile as the postage stamps on which they came to feature. In this paper, I trace the genealogy of this representational flux through analysis of the images of Aboriginality that featured on postage stamps, as well as exploring the unique interaction of government and popular influence on the postage stamp as form.

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2 Some sources attribute the moniker ‘one pound Jimmy’ to the price Tjungurrayi sold boomerangs he made, others to his postage stamp fame, and some to the price he asked in exchange for sharing of cultural knowledge. Taking into account particular events in his life history, and given the exchange rates for the good mentioned, Jillian Barnes makes a compelling case that the nickname likely referred to very high price Tjungurrayi set for the sharing of his cultural knowledge after several of his countrymen were violently coerced into revealing cultural secrets. See: Barnes, ‘Resisting the Captured Image’, 114–15.
This article draws on an extensive recent scholarship concerning representations of Aboriginal Australians within colonial discourse,³ as well as scholarship that uses mobility as an analytic frame. Stamps are, after all, mobile objects by design, and this article seeks to politically and culturally historicise these transitory sources and their complex social lives.⁴ Postage stamps act as ‘tiny transmitters’ of nationalist and colonial ideology due both to their capacity for movement and to act as sites of official, state-sanctioned visual propaganda.⁵ The fact that stamps are mobile transmitters results from their most basic function, as all postage stamps are destined for viewing by a large international audience. The result is that stamps have perhaps ‘more concentrated ideological density per square centimetre than any other cultural form’, as they move through the world as miniature nation-building propaganda.⁶ And yet, despite their ties to government officialdom, stamps are also ubiquitous, cheap, accessible by everyone and a favoured item for collection. Their collectability appeals to popular audiences, which in turn drives their design and production as governments have sought to capitalise on people’s desire to collect by releasing special editions, and stamps featuring a wider variety of subject matter. Australia Post began issuing commemorative stamps in 1927, a change from their earlier practice of issuing stamps only for postal requirements. This shift marked the beginning of a new era in Australian Government stamp production, as commemorative stamps were issued regularly to generate public interest and satisfy the desires of philatelists. This required a greater selection of imagery, preferably exciting or interesting, to replace the long-serving pre-1927 kangaroo with map of Australia (Figure 2), and King George VI stamps.

³ Many scholars have attended to visual representations of Aboriginal Australians in popular, mass-produced and colonial culture, including Lynette Russell’s exploration of images of ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ Aboriginality in Walkabout, and Liz Conor’s exploration of stereotypic visual leitmotifs of Aboriginal women in popular print media and material culture (Russell, ‘Going Walkabout in the 1950’s’, 4–8; Conor, Skin Deep). Adrian Franklin has considered the emergence of kitsch Aboriginalia in the Australian tourist market as a kind of national branding amid seemingly contradictory assimilationist policy (Franklin, ‘Aboriginalia’, 195–208), while Jillian Barnes has similarly explored the history of visual representations of Aboriginal Australia in central Australian tourist promotion and materials (Barnes, ‘Resisting the Captured Image’; Barnes, ‘Tourism and Place-Making at Uluru’, 77–104). Jane Lydon has repeatedly demonstrated the power of photographic representations of Aboriginal people as visual evidence in historical debates concerning Australian colonial history (Lydon, Photography, Humanitarianism, Empire; Lydon, “Behold the Tears”, 234–50; Lydon, Eye Contact). Penny Edmonds has highlighted the ways in which early colonial imagery of Aboriginal peoples in Australia were formed within interconnected global and imperial histories (Edmonds, “Failing in Every Endeavour to Conciliate”; Edmonds, The Proclamation Cup). The construction of the ‘native’ in the form of flora, fauna or persons, as a visual articulation of settler Australianness, identity and (un)belonging has also taken root as subject matter particularly favoured by Australian postcolonial artists (see, for example, Cozzolino and Rutherford, Symbols of Australia; Langton and David, ‘William Ricketts Sanctuary’; Taylor, ‘Settler Children, Kangaroos and the Cultural Politics of Australian National Belonging’). For representation of this topic in visual art, see Cininas, Antipodean Bestiary, 21–39; Gardner, ‘Brook Andrew’, 668–75.


⁵ Igor Cusack coined the phrase ‘tiny transmitter’ to denote the nationalist ideological dissemination the form made possible. Cusack, ‘Tiny Transmitters of Nationalist and Colonial Ideology’, 591.

⁶ Scott, European Stamp Design, 13.
Figure 2: The 1913 kangaroo and map 1d postage stamp. Designer unknown; engraver: Samuel Reading.
Source: Courtesy of Australia Post.
Stamps are required to appeal to popular audiences, which complicates their role as bearers of official, national imagery. Stamps, Pauliina Raento argues, offer ‘the national elite of a state a direct, mundane contact with its citizens’, yet stamps also absorb popular cultural forms and tropes to meet their commercial function. This, I argue, makes stamps simultaneous products of both popular culture and governmentality, hence the imagery selected for this tiniest public exhibition space represents their unique interaction.

Douglas Frewer has suggested that postage stamps can be viewed as social agents, drawing on the many studies of material culture that consider objects as being imbued with an agency and social power that provokes reaction and response by individuals or societies, which in turn incite actions and events. Materiality and sociability are mutually constituted and reinforcing, according to this line of thinking. Postage stamps can be considered social actors, as their creators intend to provoke particular responses and ideas in those who use and view them. The creator and the viewer are therefore actors who exist in a communicative social network constituted by the object. In the case of stamps, the creator is the state, and stamps as social agent become a site of interaction between popular audiences, popular culture and governmentality.

This interaction gave Australian stamps a unique role in the cultural dissemination of Australian nationalist imaginings of Aboriginality in the twentieth century. To trace the history of Australian stamps is to trace the history of Australian nationalist iconography, considering its international projections. Yet this history also includes a popular audience who received and shaped government messaging within a communicative network, facilitated by the postage stamp as social actor. Considering representations of Aboriginality within the visual lexicon of this interactive space allows for an examination of change and continuity in settler Australian attitudes towards, and conceptions of, Aboriginal Australians and their place in the nation.

As Chris Healy has observed, settler acknowledgement of Indigenous presence in Australian history has been defined by complex processes of recognition, repudiation and forgetting. The emergence of a symbolic, visual Aboriginal presence in the mid-twentieth century can easily be read within such a framework. Indeed, the two stamps released in the 1930s appear to reflect settler imaginings of a lost primordial past and ‘authentic’ Aboriginality, the classic trope of a ‘vanishing race’ overrun and replaced by settler modernity. Yet at the same time the selection of Tjungurrayi’s image for use on a stamp in 1950 also reflects more complex and shifting racial and cultural understandings of Aboriginality in the interwar and postwar periods. While there was

9 Healy, Forgetting Aborigines.
no singular Australian approach to understanding or imagining Aboriginal society at this time, earlier emphasis on typologies drawn from racial science that informed theories of biological absorption and gave rise to assimilationist policies began to intermix with cultural and environmental understandings of difference influenced by anthropology.\(^\text{10}\) There was a growing realisation that Aboriginal people were likely to continue to survive into the future as a distinctive minority population, albeit to some extent socially and culturally assimilated into the settler majority.\(^\text{11}\) These shifts coincided with a renewed interest in Aboriginal culture in the interwar period, in part influenced by anthropological expeditions in northern Australia by Ted Strehlow, Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen, and Ronald and Catherine Berndt. Art and literary movements that sought to forge a distinctively Australian creative culture turned to these anthropological accounts and the Aboriginal peoples of central and northern Australia for inspiration. Members of the Jindyworobak literary movement integrated Aboriginal subjects and mythologies in their writing for example, while modernist painter Margaret Preston appropriated visual motifs common to Aboriginal art. Crass bric-a-brac depicting Aboriginal people filled suburban living rooms.

Though this article intends to analyse representations of Tjungurrayi and Aboriginality more broadly, I will conclude by considering Tjungurrayi the man: a father, husband, stockman, lawmaker. The history of Tjungurrayi’s own family includes an intergenerational engagement with the ubiquitous postage stamp.\(^\text{12}\) Tjungurrayi was a key historical figure who negotiated multiple identities and complex interactions with settler society throughout his life, and his story should be as recognised as his image.

### Stamps as Aboriginalia

Accounting for the genealogy of the use of Tjungurrayi’s image is less than straightforward considering the multiple forms of media through which it has been disseminated. Over the span of a century his portrait has made appearances on the front cover of *Walkabout* magazine in 1936 and 1950, was used on stamps in 1938 and from 1950 to 1966, has been printed on ashtrays and decorative plates, and is still featured on Australian currency.\(^\text{13}\) It is impossible to read one single, stable meaning into an image of such diverse origins and receptions, so instead I identify three formative historical strands that contextualise why Tjungurrayi’s image took on such representative power. They are Australian nationalism and government

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10 McGregor, ‘Governance, Not Genocide’, 290–311; Rowse, Indigenous and Other Australians since 1901, 169–70.
11 McGregor, ‘Governance, Not Genocide’.
12 Donald M. Reid has argued that it is the ubiquity of stamps that also makes them invisible, see Reid, ‘The Symbolism of Postage Stamps’, 223.
13 Russell notes use of Tjungurrayi’s image on ashtray and decorative plates in ‘Going Walkabout’, 5.
assimilation policy; the intensely racialised, kitsch Australiana featured on bric-a-brac and homewares that drew on Aboriginal motifs, popular from the 1940s to 1970s, referred to as ‘Aboriginalia’; and a legacy of colonial-era visual representations of central Australian Aboriginal men. The two latter histories were deeply entangled with the tourist industry, which I will consider first before turning to mid-century government assimilation policy and civic nation-building.

There were only three instances of Aboriginal motifs being used in Australian postage stamps prior to the use of Tjungurrayi’s image in 1950. That Aboriginal imagery came to feature on stamps as official, nationally and internationally projected government imagery during the interwar and postwar period, after an exceptionally long absence, is curious and worthy of explanation. That this occurred during a period in which Australian Government Aboriginal policy was one broadly described as ‘assimilation’ is a seemingly puzzling contradiction.

The first stamp to feature an Aboriginal person was not produced until 1934, to mark the centenary of Victoria, and Marcia Langton describes it as picturing a ‘landscape of the imperial saga of civilisation conquering savagery’. That Aboriginal imagery was absent from stamps for such a long time relates only partly to the commercial practices of Australia Post. Earlier forms of official, national iconography sought to naturalise and emphasise colonial settler ties to the land, relying most often on depictions of distinctive native flora and fauna. The first national stamp released after Federation, in 1913, shown in Figure 2, is a fine example of this appropriation. Aboriginal people, who were necessarily displaced in order for the settler colony to expand, were conspicuously absent and intentionally forgotten in the search for a distinctly Australian national visual iconography.

14 Though this article considers the origins of Aboriginalia within the settler colonial imagination, framing these items as depictions of intensely racialised stereotypes, it is important to note that contemporary Aboriginal people’s perceptions of and interactions with this material culture can be more complex. Visual artist Tony Albert has noted that he felt an intense emotional connectedness with Aboriginalia as a young person and became an avid collector of these items. Albert describes wanting to be surrounded by Aboriginalia, which felt ‘like looking at pictures of family. The joy and amazement that we could have our images placed upon these day to day objects’. He goes on to describe a shift in his relationship with the objects, moving to ‘politically understanding the connotations behind them, the ways in which Aboriginal people are labelled and re-labelled, are anthropologically gazed upon. The sinister nature and undertones attached to them’. Albert states that his use of Aboriginalia in his art practice is a way of ‘re-voicing’ the objects, to use them in a way contrary to their original connotations. See Tony Albert, ‘Why Does Tony Albert Collect Aboriginalia?’, YouTube, 31 May 2018, QAGOMA, accessed 31 August 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=yPbd808PUiU.

15 Adrian Franklin, Maggie Walter and Aileen Moreton-Robinson have explored this seeming contradiction in reference to a broader range of visual materials depicting Aboriginal people, described as ‘Aboriginalia’, during the assimilation era: Franklin, Walter and Moreton-Robinson, ‘Repositories of Recognition?’, 11. For the history of the policy of assimilation in Australia see, for example, Armitage, Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation.


That the Victorian centenary stamp emerged when it did is particularly significant in light of the silence that preceded it. In this image (Figure 3), the Yarra River acts as a symbolic, contrasting divider between an ancient and forgotten past, and the progress and success of the settler present (and imagined future). The Kulin nations man pictured becomes a symbol of the settler transformation of a primordial ‘wasteland’ into a productive, modern nation – a spectre of dispossession. He leans forward as if to take a step but freezes in an anticipatory moment of surprised contemplation as he considers the new world on the bank opposite, which did not, in this era of eugenic theory and biological absorption, reserve a place for him.
Figure 4: (left) The 1938 Centenary of Geelong collectable poster stamp of no postal validity produced by the City of Geelong. Designer unknown. The stamp features a print clearly based on the Walkabout photograph of Tjungurrayi; (right) The photograph of Tjungurrayi taken by Roy Dunstan that featured in Walkabout 2, no. 3 (1 January 1936): 14.

Source: (left) Image courtesy of private collection; (right) Courtesy of National Library of Australia (Rex Nan Kivell Collection, JAF NEWSPAPER 919.4 WAL).

A second, very similar stamp (Figure 4, left) was produced four years later in 1938. Released to mark the centenary of the Victorian town Geelong in 1938, it is an incredibly rare collectable stamp. It has no decimal mark as it was not issued by the Post-Master General’s Department and hence could not be used to send mail. It was produced by the city of Geelong purely as a collector’s item. Remarkably, the Aboriginal man featured on the stamp is Tjungurrayi. The stamp print is clearly based on a Roy Dunstan photograph of Tjungurrayi that first appeared in Walkabout two years previously (Figure 4, right), in 1936. Tjungurrayi had encountered Charles Holmes, editor of the Australian National Travel Association magazine Walkabout, somewhere east of Alice Springs in the early 1930s and accepted Holmes’s request for Dunstan, Walkabout’s official photographer, to capture his image. At the time the photograph was taken, it would not have been apparent that the resulting image would circulate not only nationally but also internationally, being repurposed across several different mediums. This chance encounter was to have a lasting impact on Tjungurrayi’s life, transforming him into a public figure and forging a visual legacy that has extended beyond his lifetime. Due to its rarity, the existence of this stamp has not been accounted for in the only other brief historical account of Aboriginal representation on Australian stamps. Nor is it noted in other scholarly work that considers representations of Tjungurrayi in the context of tourist promotion. This is significant as the 1950 stamp featuring Tjungurrayi’s portrait is not the first stamp to feature a living Australian as has been claimed. It is, incredibly, not even the first stamp to feature Tjungurrayi.

18 Langton, ‘Stamped!’.
19 Barnes, ‘Resisting the Captured Image’; Rolls and Johnston, Travelling Home.
The Geelong centenary stamp may have been based on the Victorian centenary stamp, or at least have drawn inspiration from it, while also incorporating the recent photographs of Tjungurrayi printed in *Walkabout*. Both stamp prints represent an apparently ‘authentic’ Aboriginal presence in Australia as relegated to distant and ancient time, and in doing so suggest the contemporary presence of Aboriginal
people as anachronistic. Aboriginal men are imaged in these prints to act as a symbolic, visual contrast to settler development and progress, underscored by the European buildings pictured. Settler conceptions of Australia as a land taken from primordial ‘savagery’ to modernity explain why an image of Tjungurrayi, a central Australian man, has been superimposed over a Victorian town that he never visited, thousands of kilometres from his home. These types of representations of central Australian men were inspired by a genre of classically depicted ‘noble savage’ types from the frontier period, which also contrasted Aboriginality with modernity.\(^{20}\)

Dunstan’s photograph of Tjungurrayi on the cover of *Walkabout* (Figure 5) and the two Victorian centenary stamps come at the tail end of several decades of pioneer-inspired depictions of central Australian Aboriginal people. This visual language drew heavily on prior, late nineteenth-century exploration narratives that cast white explorers of the interior as the venerated heroes of empire battling the ‘dead centre’ wasteland of the nation in order to incorporate it into an accelerating settler colonial expansion in the years following Federation.\(^{21}\) Aboriginal men in these colonial narratives were presented as dangerous, anonymised aggressors who clashed with white explorers and pastoralists who were then ‘forced’ to defend themselves.\(^{22}\) In her account of the making of Uluru as a tourist site, Barnes argues that *Walkabout* drew on these established narrative and illustrative tropes when photographing Aboriginal people in central Australia in the 1930s. The men selected by Roy Dunstan were framed by captions that labelled them as heavily armed and sly aggressors, suspended in time and indistinguishable from the men who had decades earlier violently clashed with explorers of the interior.\(^{23}\)

The twentieth-century tourist industry drew heavily on the racialised imagery of this earlier colonial lexicon, and central Australia, in particular, featured so prominently as it was considered a ‘primordial’ site of perceived Aboriginal ‘authenticity’. As Lynette Russell argues, Aboriginal people in south-eastern Australia, often localised in urban centres, were thought to have been subsumed into the white population and therefore were not considered to be ‘real’ Aborigines. The representational density of Aboriginal ‘authenticity’ via its connotations to a deep, static past explains the concentration of depictions of central Australians in Victorian stamps communicating modernity and development in the 1930s. The Red Centre became a fixture of the Melburnian imagination during this period, a hinterland comparative to urban modernity that offered a seemingly authentic route to settler ‘naturalisation’ as Australians.\(^{24}\)

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20 Barnes, ‘Resisting the Captured Image’, 93.
21 Federation acted as a point of mobilisation for geographic expansion, drawing previously ‘unsettled’ territories into the nationalist project. ‘Uninhabited’ regions (i.e. those with majority Aboriginal populations and minority white populations) became important sites in a politically motivated quest for spatial control that was encoded with the Federation vision of a white Australian future.
22 Barnes, ‘Resisting the Captured Image’, 86.
23 Barnes, ‘Resisting the Captured Image’; Barnes, ‘Tourism and Place-Making at Uluru’.
Debate continues over the possible meanings that can be read into Dunstan’s photograph of Tjungurrayi in the context of other representations of Aboriginality in the widely disseminated middlebrow magazine *Walkabout*. It seems certain that Tjungurrayi’s image was selected for both the 1938 and 1950 stamps in order to capitalise on the popularity already generated from *Walkabout*. The selection of his portrait for display across multiple forms of media coincided with an increase in the popularity of Aboriginal design in both tourist and Australian markets that saw an explosion of ‘Aboriginalia’ souvenirs and bric-a-brac. The rising popularity of these kitsch forms was perhaps informed by the Australian art and literary movements of the 1920s and 1930s, which appropriated Aboriginal subject matter, and the interest in Aboriginal peoples generated by *Walkabout*. Liz Conor describes Aboriginalia as drawing on Aboriginal motifs and emblems and depicting racialised stereotypes including ‘Aboriginal children as “picanninies”, women as “Lubras”, men as “Myalls” and elders as “noble savages”’. Tjungurrayi’s image in *Walkabout* and on the 1938 and 1950 stamps in many ways belong to this archive of Australiana kitsch, which appropriated Aboriginal culture and imagery in modernised re-imaginings of the noble savage trope. Reading Tjungurrayi’s portraits within this archive allows for the enduring popularity of his image to be located within settler society’s romanticisation of the timeless stasis of ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional’ Aboriginal society, thought to be fast disappearing.

A third stamp (Figure 6), released in 1948, was the first to feature ‘Aboriginal art’, and is similarly connected to the mid-century rise of settler appropriation of Aboriginal designs and the proliferation of Aboriginalia. The timing of its release coincides with the established interest in Aboriginal art by Australian modernist artists. Margaret Preston is one of the best known figures of this mid-century arts and craft movement, but many other artists and designers incorporated Aboriginal design in their art practice, including Tasmanian potter Violet Mace, who travelled to central Australia to obtain Aboriginal designs for her pottery. Telling of the growing influence of ‘settler primitivism’ on Australian mid-century art and design, the print featured on the 1948 stamp was not the work of an Aboriginal artist. The image was a stylistic imitation of rock art by an Estonian immigrant, Gert Sellheim; the winning image in a nationwide stamp design competition in 1946.

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28 Lynette Russell has explored the links between the noble savage trope and Aboriginalia in ‘Going *Walkabout*’, 4–8.
30 Thomas, *Possessions*.
31 It was not until 1971 that a stamp featured artwork produced by an Aboriginal artist, though the artist was not the focus of the stamp and was anonymised. I have been unable to find the name of the commissioned artist.
Figure 6: The 1948 ‘Aboriginal Art’ 2s postage stamp. Designer: Gert Sellheim; Engraver: George Lissende.
Source: Courtesy of Australia Post.

Sellheim was not alone in his appropriation, and interestingly many of those who contributed to the spread and popularity of appropriated Aboriginal symbols and motifs in design were also new immigrants. Langton and David have argued that with the arrival of postwar European immigrants came more discussion of the need for immigrants to assimilate into the ‘Australian way of life’, which though always poorly defined, inspired the creation of an Australian image for overseas export to
encourage tourism and immigration. The Australian National Travel Association, creator of *Walkabout*, engaged in image- and placemaking that highlighted climate, ancient Aboriginal heritage, nature, wilderness and unique flora and fauna as distinctly Australian attractions. As has been noted, ‘Aboriginalia’ souvenirs and images played a central role in this new tourist marketing, re-imagining colonial-era tropes for modern audiences. The influx of immigrants also marked a shift in the direction of Australian nation-building, as civically defined nationalism replaced the earlier Federation-era ethnonationalism exemplified by the White Australia policy that would previously have excluded many of the postwar arrivals.

The tropes of Aboriginalia are, indisputably, a defining element in the social lives of the stamps featuring Tjungurrayi. The Aboriginalia that became representative of settler Australia’s incorporation of the Red Centre into the national imaginary influenced the way general audiences viewed and understood the images of Tjungurrayi on stamps. Both the 1938 and 1950 stamps featuring Tjungurrayi belong to this visual history and its generative ideology, and it was not, as Langton notes, until the early 1980s that stamps began to reflect the ‘social changes that rapid reform by governments of the administration of Indigenous affairs throughout the 1970s’.

Yet in the postwar era, at the time the 1950 stamp of Tjungurrayi was released, the first stirrings of a civically rather than ethnically defined national future were emerging, which would inform 1970s reform and policy shift to self-determination.

The nationalisation of Indigenous imagery and symbols is itself, as Langton argues, a symbol of a postcolonial state, which provides additional explanation for the rise of ‘Aboriginalia’ and the popularity of Tjungurrayi’s image mid-century. The colonising settler nation-state comes to know and own the Indigenous as they gain dominion of the land, and hence reproduces its forms as a part of its nationalist imagery, asserting ownership. While central Australians like Tjungurrayi were cast as representative of stone age stasis, bringing the Red Centre into the Australian national imagination was an act of placemaking that determined to make an appropriated land feel like home to an alien settler population. Central Australia was imaginatively incorporated into ‘modern’ Australia and its future, and central Australians came to form a part of a new visual landscape.

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33 Barnes, ‘Tourism and Place-Making at Uluru’.
34 Langton, ‘Stamped!’ , 28.
36 Barnes, ‘Tourism and Place-Making at Uluru’.
Picturing assimilation and civic nationhood

That Aboriginalia emerged during the assimilation period could be read as evidence of the cultural formation of a ‘repository of recognition’ at a time when the Australian Government had formulated a native affairs policy that intended to physiologically and culturally absorb the Aboriginal population into the white settler majority. The conscious projection and promotion of Aboriginal motifs to national and international audiences at this time appears at odds with assimilatory policy. Given the influence of the Aboriginalia genre on stamp representations, it is tempting to consider the presence of Aboriginality on mid-century stamps as an outlet for an ambiguous settler nostalgia evoked by the presumed assimilation and hence disappearance of Aboriginal people. As Conor describes, ‘The figures found in Aboriginalia evoke a troubling presence, in which visual appeal, sometimes libidinal, stands in for the profound ambivalence at the heart of settler-colonialism, which has benefited from the violent dispossession of a people.’

Though government Indigenous policy in the interwar and postwar periods has frequently been compartmentalised and referred to jointly as the ‘assimilation era’, Russell McGregor has argued that the interwar policy of assimilation through biological absorption was distinct from postwar sociocultural assimilation. This change in policy direction is crucial to account for, as while the policy of biological absorption assumed and engineered the ‘inevitable’ demise of Aboriginal people, sociocultural assimilation did not. It instead assumed, for the first time, that Aboriginal people would continue to survive, and be incorporated into the Australian nation-state, though as culturally and socially assimilated with the white settler majority. Yet it is also true that there was no unified, singular understanding of the presumed trajectory of Aboriginal society, nor a neat and easily identifiable intellectual shift from biological to sociocultural assimilation in the formation and implementation of Aboriginal policy in northern Australia. As Tim Rowse notes, notions of the ‘decline, development, absorption, disappearance, detribalisation’ of Aboriginal peoples and societies existed simultaneously, intersecting and cross-fertilising.

37 Adrian Franklin makes this argument in his consideration of the emergence of ‘Aboriginalia’ tourist wares during the assimilation period from the 1940s to the 1970s, see Franklin, ‘Aboriginalia’.
40 McGregor describes this ‘new objective of national incorporation’ as a definitive turning point in government policy, though notes that biological absorption intended a form national incorporation also, though by vastly different method, ‘Governance, Not Genocide’, 296–97.
41 Rowse, Indigenous and Other Australians, 169.
This distinction is important in the context of understanding the use of Tjungurrayi’s image on the 1950 stamp; however, it is not because policies of biological assimilation or sociocultural assimilation represent clear intellectual trends, or necessarily resulted in a marked change in the lived experiences of Indigenous people, who still faced ongoing dispossession, racial discrimination and policies that allowed paternalistic government intervention into their lives. Nor is it because this change in government policy had an immediate effect on popular understandings of assimilation in the public imagination. Ordinary people were likely unaware that the postwar assimilation policy was distinct from earlier policies of biological absorption. This is evidenced quite clearly via the hundreds of letters sent to Tjungurrayi by members of the public, from Australia and abroad, who had viewed his image on the stamp and were keen to acquire a copy of his thumbprint as a memento of ‘a vanishing race’.42 Their desires expressed a bizarre and ad hoc intellectual mixture of Victorian-era evolutionary Tylorism and extinction theory that had popularised the idea that the ‘extinction’ of Aboriginal tribes was the expected imminent result of contact with ‘superior’ European cultures.

Tjungurrayi left no first-hand account of his experience of his unexpected fame, but from the limited media accounts available he appears to have resented the attention the stamp drew to him, at least at first. In 1953, three years after the stamp was released, Tjungurrayi was working as a station hand at Central Mount Wedge, 260 kilometres west of Alice Springs. His postage stamp fame had increased his recognisability considerably, and it is at this time that he is reported to have shaved off his beard in an attempt to conceal his identity.43 Tjungurrayi initially resisted requests for his thumbprint by avoiding the local Native Affairs patrol officer Les Penhall who, in March 1953, was trying to attain it for collectors.44 A copy was eventually obtained for an American stamp collector, though it is unclear what caused Tjungurrayi to change his mind and provide his print. Coercion may have been used, though Tjungurrayi had throughout his life proved a skilled negotiator and communicator, acting as an interlocutor in cross-cultural interactions with anthropologists. This suggests that far from being outside of his element in negotiating such exchanges with white men, he was perhaps within it. Though several accounts from July 1953 describe Tjungurrayi as shy in relation to his fame, his employer is reported at this time to have purchased an ink pad, and more than one copy of Tjungurrayi’s thumbprint entered circulation.45 Tjungurrayi’s initial reluctance may have reflected his relationship with the particular patrol officer

42 ‘Although He Doesn’t Know It, One Pound Jimmy Is Immortal’, Age (Melbourne), 22 March 1952, 2; ‘Autograph Hunters Will Miss Jimmy’, Age (Melbourne), 14 July 1953, 4; ‘One-Pound Jimmy Shaved’, Centralian Advocate (Alice Springs), 17 July 1953, 4.
43 See ‘One-Pound Jimmy Shaved’, Centralian Advocate.
44 See reference to Tjungurrayi ‘going bush’ to avoid a Native Affairs Patrol Officer attempting to take his fingerprint, reported in ‘One Pound Jimmy’s Autograph’, Centralian Advocate (Alice Springs), 21 March 1952, 6.
45 ‘Autograph Hunters Will Miss Jimmy’, Age.
attempting to approach him, or he may have discerned the possibility to negotiate a more worthwhile exchange with those who wished to take copies of his print, and come to an arrangement with his employer.

Despite the complexities of Tjungurrayi’s and other Aboriginal people’s lived experiences, this change in assimilation policy is crucial to account for as it is connected to a particular understanding of national citizenship and nation-building. Given stamps’ functions as visual communicators of national ideology, understanding how ‘nation’ was defined is crucial to their semiotic decoding. The postwar era marks a global shift in direction of the ideologies of nationalism, and these changed conceptions were reflected in the national iconography featured on stamps across several settler colonies in the mid-twentieth century.46

Maloney conducted a transnational analysis of the stamps of the settler colonies of Australia, Canada and New Zealand, arguing that the nationalist imagery featured on stamps developed in similar phases throughout the twentieth century.47 Across each country, the imagery used on stamps follows a similar trajectory, moving from nationalist identity based on imperial ties to Britain and economic contribution to empire, to the ethnonationalism of the early twentieth century (defined in Australia by the White Australia policy)48 to what Maloney describes as the more unifying civic imagery drawn upon post-1950. The inclusion of Aboriginal people (and white women) in stamp imagery in the mid- to late twentieth century can be taken to reflect the development of an increasingly civic minded and liberal culture, concerned with multicultural representation.

On the postwar global stage, Australia would not have been inclined to advertise Australian nation-building as based in an ethnonationalism achieved through assimilatory policy or eugenics theory.49 Civic nationhood became the new nationalist framework for western democracies, and the postwar policy of sociocultural assimilation was, according to McGregor, exemplary of a civic nationhood, ‘whereby national cohesion would be attained through shared rights and responsibilities, a common public culture, substantial consistency in values and aspirations, and the veneration of national symbols such as flag and anthem’.50 Cultural conformity to the dominant ethnic group, white settler Australians, was demanded, and it was

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48 Darian-Smith, Grimshaw and Macintyre, Britishness Abroad.
49 Carey has examined the connections between eugenics theory and discourses of whiteness in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century, and indeed eugenics theory and biological absorption are often oppositional. Eugenicists argued for segregation and sterilisation of those deemed unfit, and potential containments to the ‘white race’, though focused relatively little on the ‘Aboriginal problem’ and the ‘solution’ of biological absorption despite their underlying preoccupation with ensuring white supremacy, see for instance Carey, “Not Only a White Race”, 162–65.
50 McGregor, ‘Governance, Not Genocide’, 297. Russell McGregor also makes the argument that the ethnonationalism that provided the framework for the Federation-era White Australia policy and interwar Aboriginal policy began to shift to civic nationalism in the 1950s–1960s in ‘One People’, 03.1–03.17.
into this culture that any minority ethnic ‘others’, Aboriginal or immigrant, were required to assimilate. There are of course elements of ethnonationalism within this civic nationalism, but it was cultural rather than biological assimilation demanded of Australian citizens from the 1950s to 1970s. This is how Tjungurrayi’s portrait was able to become a kind of national symbol of civic, Australian nationhood.

Though the use of Tjungurrayi’s image on the 1950 stamp is not entirely removed from the semiotic messaging of the 1930s stamps, this change in global context and Australian policy is significant and could account for some key changes in presentation during the interwar to postwar period. By 1950, for instance, Tjungurrayi is shown in head and shoulder profile (Figure 1), significant in that representations of central Australian Aboriginal men standing silently on one leg with spear in hand had become a ubiquitous stereotype, and, in the manner of stereotypes, homogenised individual Aboriginal men into a racial ‘type’ in visual representations. In the context of these historic depictions of central Australian men as ‘noble savages’, the choice to present Tjungurrayi in portrait form is a notable visual shift. Though Tjungurrayi is not personally identified on the stamp, instead labelled as ‘Aborigine’ (as if broadly descriptive of a racial type), his identity was publicised very widely in the media. His anglicised name ‘Jimmy’ was associated with his image, both photographic and print, and he was known as a real, living person, a first in regard to Aboriginal representation on stamps. This is a clear point of departure from the 1938 stamp (Figure 4) drawn from his photograph, where Tjungurrayi was so anonymised that he has not been associated with the image until now.

While a shifting political landscape saw new forms of nationalism conceptualised, accompanied by revised nationalist rhetoric and imagery, this move towards a seemingly progressive civic citizenship cannot be isolated from the history of settler impressions of Aboriginal Australians to which the miniscule, pocket-sized lithograph of Tjungurrayi’s face also belonged. The Aboriginal imagery and people featured on stamps in the decades after the 1950–66 print run featuring Tjungurrayi fit more readily within a framework of civic nationalism, though Tjungurrayi’s stamp portrait remains attached to the earlier visual lexicon of the colonial frontier and its modernised re-rendering as ‘Aboriginalia’ tourist tat in the middling years of the twentieth century.

51 Russell identifies this stereotype in ‘Going Walkabout’, 4.
52 Johnston and Rolls argue that some of the ways Tjungurrayi was presented in Walkabout were not necessarily racially othering, and were consistent with the way photographs of non-Aboriginal subjects or other subject matter were presented in the publication. See Rolls and Johnston, Travelling Home, 127–30.
Kitsch representations of Aboriginal people are not benign design elements, but, as Langton and David argue, have a ‘corrosive effect on the public imagination in dealing with Aboriginal people’ and hence prevent the incorporation of Australian Aboriginal people into civil society. It is intriguing that a representation of Tjungurrayi on a stamp, chosen for its associations with the popular Aboriginalia genre, was used in an attempt to incorporate Aboriginal people into a national

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civic imagery. Even later twentieth-century representations of Aboriginal people on stamps that display greater synchronicity with conceptions of civic nationalism, such as those that feature Truganini and Albert Namatjira, absorb Aboriginal people into nationalist imagery as if such an act was untroublesome, historically neutral, as if ‘there were no troubling questions about their place in the nation’. The choice of Truganini for the 1975 Australian ‘famous women’ series (Figure 7) is equally and especially notable in this regard, given that her popular fame was derived from the myth of her people’s extinction.

Dignity, integrity, knowledge: The life of Gwoja Tjungurrayi

Tjungurrayi’s own personal history reflects many ‘troubling questions’ about the place of Aboriginal people within the nation. Tjungurrayi was a survivor of the 1928 Coniston massacre, when up to 70 people, men, women and children, were brutally murdered. Tjungurrayi left no original, recorded testimony regarding the massacre, though it can be safely assumed it was a permanently life-altering experience defined by abject terror and despair. The Coniston massacre exemplifies the violent displacement of Aboriginal people that underpinned settler colonial expansion and the creation of the modern, ‘civic’ Australian nation-state. Tjungurrayi survived such an event only to be chosen as a representative for a newly ‘civic’ Australia.

Born around 1895 in the Tanami Desert north-west of Alice Springs, Tjungurrayi was a stockman and station hand by trade, but he was also a traditional lawman, land custodian, cultural intermediary and guide, and family man. Tjungurrayi was married to Long Rose Nagnala in the late 1930s, with whom he had five adopted children, four sons and one daughter. Tjungurrayi took his responsibility as a father and law custodian very seriously, and was dedicated to ensuring traditional law and knowledge of country was passed down for future generations. It has been suggested that Tjungurrayi collaborated with so many anthropologists, including Ted Strehlow in the 1930s and Charles Mountford in the 1960s, as it allowed him greater opportunity to pass on knowledge to his sons and demonstrate that they could gain the respect of settler society by showcasing their own culture.

54 Langton, ‘Stamped!’, 26. A portrait of famed landscape artist Albert Namatjira was issued on a five-cent stamp in 1968.
55 For histories of the extinction myth in visual representations of the Tasmanians see, for example, Gleeson, ‘Memories and Moonbirds’; Gough, ‘Forgotten Lives’; Lehman, ‘Tasmanian Gothic’.
56 For a historiographical review of frontier violence in Australia see, for example, Rogers and Bain, ‘Genocide and Frontier Violence in Australia’, 83–100.
57 Sadly, Tjungurrayi’s daughter Joycee died of pneumonia at a young age, see Ainslie Roberts, ‘Mailbag: One Pound Jimmy’.
Tjungurrayi acted as an intermediary, translator and guide for Mountford, who described the men who shared their knowledge of the central desert, as ‘possess[ing] great dignity’, ‘proven integrity’ and ‘profound philosophical knowledge’. Mountford’s collaborator, artist and photographer Ainslie Roberts also greatly admired and respected Tjungurrayi, creating the lithograph of Tjungurrayi that inspired the image on the Australian two dollar coin.

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59 ‘Two Dollars’, Royal Australian Mint.
Tjungurrayi’s demonstration of the value of Aboriginal culture appears to have had a profound effect on his sons, who went on to become leaders of the Western Desert art movement at Papunya. One of his children, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, became one of the most well-known, regarded and collected Aboriginal artists in Australian history. Another of his sons, Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri, also became an accomplished artist. In 1988, 23 years after Tjungurrayi’s death, one of Tim’s paintings was featured on a postage stamp as a part of the ‘Art of the Desert’ series (Figure 8). Unlike his father’s designation as ‘Aborigine’ in 1950, Tim is showcased as a significant artist, his name accompanying his painting on the face of the stamp.

Conclusion: Officialising Aboriginalia

The postage stamp, as a mobile social actor, connected person to person on a global scale, representing and promoting the Australian nation through a visual language that signalled and constructed a settler vision of Aboriginality through the racialised tropes of Aboriginalia. Though Australian stamps featuring Aboriginal content were officially mandated by governments, they had roots in popular cultural forms, both visual and ideological. By the mid-twentieth century, during Tjungurrayi’s lifetime, the kitsch Australiana of Aboriginalia had become an increasingly common and popular representation of Aboriginality. This not only informed the selection of Tjungurrayi’s image for use on the 1950 stamp, but in part explains its enduring popularity in Australia and abroad.

Tjungurrayi’s stamp portrait sits at the cusp of Australia’s imagined future as a modernised, civic nation. It is reflective of a mid-century bridge between a ‘white Australia’ defined by settler repudiation of Aboriginal Australia, and the first stirrings of a post-1970s multicultural future. The Victorian centenary stamps, by contrast, reference a visible Aboriginality thought to be lost due to expanding modernity. What all of the stamp images have in common is a connection to a shared history of colonial visual language.

An opportunistic meeting between Tjungurrayi and a travelling photographer produced an image that ironically evoked the geospatial boundaries of the settler colonial state as governmental propaganda, while at the same time acting as a persistent reminder that Aboriginal people and history were an ongoing presence in modern Australia. In 2019, the Northern Territory electorate formerly named Stuart was renamed in honour of Tjungurrayi. The electorate, which spans from the Victoria River in the south to the Tanami Desert and Uluru–Kata Tjuta National Park in the centre, now bears the name Gwoja. Gwoja is the Anmatyerr word for

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60 Johnson, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, 43–57.
water. That contemporary Australia is now beginning and able to remember and celebrate Tjungurrayi as an Elder, lawman and survivor is a legacy of his unlikely rise to fame on the face of a postage stamp.

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The legacy of Queensland Aboriginal Creations and contemporary artefact production

Gretchen Stolte

Abstract: Queensland Aboriginal Creations, or QAC, was the marketing arm for Queensland’s Department of Native Affairs, officially launched in 1959 and continuing until 1995. The decades in between are fascinating studies of material culture production, government policy intervention, First Nation agency and innovation and, ultimately, the continuation of cultural traditions and knowledges that span tens of thousands of years. The Department of Native Affairs had production centres across the state, mass producing boomerangs, bark paintings and pottery. In August 2019, I was contracted to curate the exhibition based on almost 10 years of ‘living with’ the QAC story and all its multifaceted aspects. This article explores the policies and production systems of Queensland Aboriginal Creations and how those systems influence and affect artists today through the lens of the University of Queensland’s Anthropology Museum’s exhibition Agency and Legacy. A brief overview of the scope of QAC’s activities will provide the overall context but it is especially through the production of artefacts and boomerangs that the innovative spirit of artists arises and the real legacy of those policies becomes apparent. Specifically, this article shifts the conversations around boomerangs from a tourist curio to a work of cultural importance through the lens of Agency and Legacy and in conversation with contemporary makers.
Introduction

In February 2020, the University of Queensland’s Anthropology Museum (UQ Anthropology Museum) launched Queensland Aboriginal Creations: Agency and Legacy to a packed room. Out of almost 3,000 objects in various collections, over 150 works were chosen to be displayed. The exhibition spans the expected (bark paintings, pottery and boomerangs) to the less expected (netted baskets, strung shells and fine wood carvings). Additionally, over 200 historical photographs from private family collections telling the personal story of the curio shop were carefully crafted into a slide show presentation, while photographs and stories from the State Archives contextualised the histories behind many of the objects. The full range of the curio shop that was Queensland Aboriginal Creations was on show for everyone to see and the ownership of that story was shared by all in attendance at the opening. The event was described by many as one of ‘coming home’, but this home has long been misunderstood.

Agency and Legacy is where the historical and the contemporary sit side by side with both fond nostalgia and uncomfortable tension. Queensland Aboriginal Creations or QAC was the marketing arm for Queensland’s Department of Native Affairs, officially launched in 1959 and continuing until 1995. The decades in between are a fascinating study of material culture production, intense government policy intervention, First Nation agency and innovation, and, ultimately, the continuation of cultural traditions and knowledges that span tens of thousands of years. The Department of Native Affairs, through QAC, had production centres across the state, mass producing boomerangs, bark paintings and pottery. Missions and early stage art centres sent spears, woomeras (spear throwers), coolamons, shell necklaces, natural fibre woven bags and other artefacts to the curio shop in Brisbane for sale. QAC also facilitated some of the most notorious breaches of cultural copyright to arguably ever be sanctioned in Australia. These examples of copying often overshadow the other activities QAC facilitated, making anything connected with QAC heavily tainted as either tourist tat or unauthentic or both. The lack of understanding of this history has a direct effect on artists producing today and knowing the QAC story alleviates many misconceptions. More importantly, knowing the history of artefact production in Queensland shifts the understanding of cultural artefacts away from a tourist commodity and makes space for the appreciation of these works as fascinating and significant cultural pieces.

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1 Credit for this portion of the exhibition goes to Curatorial Officer Mandana Mapar who put together the photographs, working closely with families and artists.

2 For a detailed historical account of QAC’s development and programs from the late 1800s through to the 1980s, see Chapter 2 ‘Curios and Artefacts’ in Stolte, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, 19–55.
This article explores the policies and production systems of Queensland Aboriginal Creations and how those systems influence and affect artists today through the lens of the UQ Anthropology Museum's exhibition Agency and Legacy. A brief overview of the scope of QAC’s activities will provide the overall context but it is especially through the production of artefacts and boomerangs that the innovative spirit of artists arises and the real legacy of those policies becomes apparent. For example, boomerangs are often an undervalued and under-appreciated form of artistic expression and, because of this, artists employing the medium today to convey their own deep cultural meanings and significances are often overlooked or regulated into commercial commodities. This article reimagines boomerangs away from a tourist curio to a work of cultural importance through a summary examination of QAC’s policies and activities while in conversation with contemporary makers.\(^3\)

**Queensland Aboriginal Creations**

The history of artefact and art production in Queensland differs from other areas of Australia. This history is due in large part to the policies enacted by the Department of Native Affairs and their heavy involvement in artefact production. Artefact production in Queensland has been in continuous practice since well before the arrival of the Europeans but colonial processes had a huge hand in redirecting the reception and even the crafting of those objects. From the late 1800s to the early 1900s, Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal communities across Queensland produced material culture objects for sale and collection by museum collectors and salvage anthropologists.\(^4\) From the early 1930s, public requests for artefacts began to boom. Research into the State Archives reveals the nature of some of these requests and their far-ranging scope. Requests for artefacts and artworks, but especially boomerangs, were both domestic and international, including Germany, France, Italy, the United States, Canada, Mexico and Japan.\(^5\)

There was a growing market for boomerangs while, at the same time, there was the persistent government desire to ‘solve the Aboriginal problem’ by creating economic opportunities. Beginning in the 1930s, the government began to encourage the production of artefacts as a source of economic viability. Queensland was not alone in this approach of linking cultural arts to commercial markets and the creation of these markets sits amid a broader trend in world Indigenous affairs. Prime examples of these

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\(^3\) Specifically, this article looks at the cross-cultural engagements between First Nation peoples and non-Indigenous collectors. It should be noted that production and exchange between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needs to be given its own treatment.


\(^5\) Queensland State Archives (QSA) Item ID336666 and Item ID336929, summary of multiple letters of correspondence across both files. See particularly a letter from the Mexican Consul for ‘certain Australian novelties suitable for gift purposes’ dated 5 April 1939. Cited in Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, 23.
efforts are programs developed in the 1930s in Canada and the United States for the production of cultural material by the Inuit and Pueblo communities, respectively.6 ‘Cultural arts’ were seen as the ‘solution’ to the ‘Indian problem’ in North America and it becomes apparent in the archive that the same philosophy was used in Queensland.

In the early months of 1933, the Chief Protector of Aborigines J. W. Bleakley began coordinating with Aboriginal and Islander communities along with the Government Tourist Bureau to develop displays of Aboriginal and Islander curios. These displays were usually available during the tourist season and were made up of ‘marine curios and aboriginal [sic] works of art’.8 On 19 December 1933, a memorandum from Bleakley to the Protector on Thursday Island reflects on the first window display as a way of ‘ascertaining whether there was any demand’ for such items by the general public.9 Displays continued for several decades not only as a way of showcasing Aboriginal and Islander creativity and ingenuity but also to incite public interest.

Figure 1: Geoffrey Doolah, setting up the Aboriginal arts and crafts and shell display for the Native Affairs Department at the Cherbourg Aboriginal Community, 1958.
Source: Queensland State Archives (QSA Item ID435956, Photographic material).

7 Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, 29.
8 Queensland Tourist Bureau’s itemised inventory sheet, c. September 1933, QSA Item ID336275.
9 J. W. Bleakley to the Protector Thursday Island, memorandum, 19 December 1933, QSA Item ID336275.
In 1958, for example, the Native Affairs Department (as it was identified) set up a display of crafts and shell work at the then Cherbourg Aboriginal Mission (Figure 1).\textsuperscript{10} Geoffrey Doolah, a Torres Strait Islander man, is photographed setting up the display. Unnamed in the Native Affairs Department’s records, his identity was revealed during the course of curating the exhibition.\textsuperscript{11} The lack of naming is not unusual as photographs from this period were used for promotional materials to support the continued efforts of the department and its goal for economic prosperity. The act of curation and research can often bring these identities to light and, indeed, it is often the only way in which these identities are reclaimed.

The first 1933 window display proved successful and demands for artefacts by the general public soared. The Department of Native Affairs decided to capitalise on this demand. In the 1950s, the department sent representatives to communities all across the state and into the Torres Strait Islands. Each community was envisioned as a production centre for particular artefacts. Hope Vale was seen as being perfectly placed to produced bark paintings for sale and bark ‘blanks’ for distribution to Mornington Island and Brisbane for artists to paint and then sell. Cherbourg was targeted for boomerang production and shops were set up for the purpose of mass production. The Torres Strait Islands were the hub of shell-collections, stringing and weaving.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1959, the Department of Native Affairs officially launched Queensland Native Creations (which was later changed to Queensland Aboriginal Creations in 1967).\textsuperscript{13} Queensland’s Department of Native Affairs was now engaged in the mass production of artefacts on a large scale. This engagement was heavy-handed with the department overseeing all aspects of production. Quality control was a top-down process. Boomerangs, for example, were scrutinised by QAC managers and the public for not returning properly or being the wrong shape. Managers sent out memos to communities dictating the proper shapes of boomerangs in an attempt to cater to the desires of buyers.\textsuperscript{14} Other complaints by customers included the timeliness of delivery (often orders were not filled fast enough) or if they appeared to be made using contemporary saws and sanders.\textsuperscript{15} The demand for a timely product, shaped according to expectations and made by traditional methods, was made with complete disregard to what was always a time-consuming and individual process.

\textsuperscript{10} The community at Cherbourg is now referred to as the Cherbourg Aboriginal Shire Council. See their website cherbourg.qld.gov.au/ for more information. Accessed 15 November 2019.

\textsuperscript{11} Special thanks to Nancy Bamaga for helping me identify Geoffrey Doolah. Further research is in progress to contact Geoffrey’s family as Doolah was a major figure at Cherbourg yet his story is still relatively unknown.

\textsuperscript{12} QSA Item ID502314. See also Stolte, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art, 31–35, for a more detailed account of these developments.

\textsuperscript{13} QSA Item ID502314.

\textsuperscript{14} J. W. Bleakley to Yarrabah’s superintendent, c. September 1933, QSA Item ID336275.

\textsuperscript{15} QSA Item ID336275.
The production of bark paintings was also a heavily regulated industry. Hope Vale wanted to engage in bark painting production but QAC managers felt that paintings from Mornington Island ‘sold better’. Craftspeople from Hope Vale were thus encouraged to make bark blanks that were shipped to Mornington Island and then Brisbane for sale. Continuing to have their own artistic capabilities ignored, Hope Vale ended up producing almost all the bark blanks for Brisbane artists as well. Despite the lack of support, Hope Vale artists continued to produce paintings on bark. Agency and Legacy has three walls of bark paintings on exhibit in order to highlight this act of agency by Hope Vale artists. Through donations from private collectors, the Queensland Museum is fortunate enough to have dozens of Hope Vale bark paintings, clearly illustrating that, despite the lack of support, artists still produced what they wanted to produce. The paintings showcase the local flora and fauna of the Cape York region including images from the rock art panels, local artefacts and basket styles and, for artists like Roy McIvor, his own stories growing up on country. An imported medium, bark paintings were used to tell local stories.

Bark paintings are a particularly poignant medium to illustrate the level of involvement the state had in artefact production. During the 1960s, bark paintings from the Northern Territory, especially from communities in Arnhem Land, were selling well and being actively collected and published by anthropologists. The Department of Native Affairs saw the popularity of bark paintings as another way for Queensland artists to engage in the market with a product that already had a great deal of public appeal. More than 20 Arnhem Land bark paintings were photographed and made into a booklet that was distributed to artists in Brisbane for copying. The Hope Vale bark blanks were handed out for Brisbane artists to copy Arnhem Land images. Orders forms were available to the public and one could order a ‘Milky Way No 8’ (it was the eighth image in the book) in a small, medium, large or extra-large size (Figure 2). Such a practice is anathema to today’s understanding of Aboriginal and Islander cultural and intellectual copyright, and the exhibition was at pains to put these paintings in a different light.

16 I. V. Istead to the Hope Vale Manager, 5 March 1968, QSA Item ID646444.
17 See Ryan, Spirit in the Land; Morphy, Becoming Art.
18 Invoice from Australian Aboriginal Creations to QAC, 1 July 1969, QSA Item ID504813.
Figure 2: A sample of an order from Australian Aboriginal Creations shop in New South Wales to Queensland Aboriginal Creations.

Objects listed are named according to the QAC catalogue that was distributed for facilitating orders such as these. Note the requests from outside Arnhem Land such as Western Australian Wandjina paintings and even Christian themes such as ‘the Birth of Christ’.

Source: Queensland State Archives (QSA Item ID504813, Photographic material).
One of the ways in which this exhibition tackled the problem of cultural infringement was to not hide it. The UQ Anthropology Museum is fortunate enough to have an example of *Milky Way No 8*. This and three other paintings are showcased as examples of this tense history.\(^{19}\) The exhibition acknowledged the copying by titling the larger text panel next to these barks as ‘Other People’s Stories’, stating outright that what was painted was not the artist’s story but someone else’s. The focus in the exhibition, however, is to show how artists strayed away from direct copying and exercised their own creative licence. Individual text panels pointed out to visitors the points of innovation in the bark paintings. In particular, the border flourishes and decorations of the top and bottom registers in the bark paintings all indicate points of divergence from Arnhem Land styles. Such analysis will be explored further in subsequent publications but as will be no surprise to anyone, bark painting is not a tradition that has continued much to this day. There are very few artists who are practising in this medium in Queensland. There are, however, a great number of artists who are crafting and selling artefacts, and it is to the production of artefacts that this article will now turn.\(^{20}\)

**Artefacts**

Although the archives reveal some grumbling about the production of spears and shields (boomerangs sold better), communities still produced and shipped numerous artefacts throughout QAC’s decades of operation (Figure 3). These activities maintained the production of these traditional Queensland artefacts and facilitated the passing down of these knowledges, which might have been lost otherwise. The UQ Anthropology Museum has an incredible collection of these lesser known and less talked about QAC artefacts from across Cape York. Bought by a rare forward-thinking director, the collection included spear throwers, spear tips, clubs and pronged fishing spears. These were highlighted in the Agency and Legacy exhibition in order to expand the public’s perception of QAC beyond just facilitating the sale of boomerangs. These artefacts are based on cultural traditions preceding colonial contact as well as any museum interest and collection practices. John Conroy, the manager of QAC during the late 1980s, remembers going through shipments that came from the Cape and seeing what he thought were incredible ethnographic finds. Conroy showed such objects to museums to see if they wanted ‘first crack’ at purchasing them; but even these artefacts were rejected because anything that came through QAC was seen as tainted by the tourism market.\(^{21}\)

\(^{19}\) Out of respect for the original artists and stories these paintings represent, these paintings will not be published here.

\(^{20}\) For more on the history of bark paintings in Queensland, see Aird, *Brisbane Blacks*; and Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*.

\(^{21}\) John Conroy, in conversation with the author, 5 October 2019.
Figure 3: Cape York artefacts from various communities including Mornington Island, Aurukun, Kowanyama and Bamaga, before 1973. Acquired through Queensland Aboriginal Creations by the UQ Anthropology Museum.

Source: Photograph by Mick Richards.
This taint extended beyond the buying of artefacts and into the representation and publication of the QAC story. Currently, there are only a handful of publications that even mention QAC and most of those focus solely on the breaches of cultural copyright surrounding the bark paintings from Arnhem Land.  

Michael Aird’s *Brisbane Blacks* is the first publication to include the voices of the artists involved, and Stolte’s chapter on the history of QAC in *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art* is the only publication that delves into the policy ramifications of QAC’s actions. The exhibition at the UQ Anthropology Museum was designed to bridge some of these publication gaps by connecting the material culture of QAC to archival documentation. Through these efforts, a re-examination of some of the assumptions put on those objects – the ‘taint’ of the tourism market – are unravelled.

Boomerangs were the hallmark of QAC’s curio shop. Although it was always filled with a variety of objects and paintings, boomerangs stood as the quintessential Australian souvenir and, therefore, were always well-stocked. Importantly, boomerangs were never (and continue not to be) uniform in design and decoration; Mornington Island boomerangs, for example, are quite distinct. Two Mornington Island boomerangs are on display in Agency and Legacy (Figure 4) and represent a host of artefacts made in the same ways as before the arrival of Europeans on the continent. These boomerangs are commonly painted on one end in white ochre with red ochre strips and are rarely decorated in any other way. These Mornington Island boomerangs are part of that collection of artefacts the UQ Anthropology Museum purchased from QAC, making the collection a valuable insight into those works.

The bottom line though is that most of the artefacts that went through QAC were not viewed as favourably. Mornington Island boomerangs are found in many museum collections across Australia but many were collected on country by collectors and researchers. Boomerangs such these are perceived differently to boomerangs that are made particularly for tourist sale. In point of fact, there seems to be a ‘boomerang as artefact’ and ‘boomerang as tourist object’ dichotomy. As spears, shields, woomeras and other artefacts do not seem to consistently share this dichotomy, a discussion on boomerangs specifically is both fascinating and interesting.

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23 Aird, *Brisbane Blacks*.

24 Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*.

25 Unfortunately, tight time frames and limited budgets prevented proper community collaboration but efforts to remedy that are currently underway.

26 See Best, ‘The Aboriginal Material Culture of the Wellesley Islands’.

27 There is in point of fact a growing niche market for other material culture objects made for tourism markets such as miniatures, like shields, coolamons (wooden containers) and woomeras, but they need their own treatment separate from the scope of this article.
Boomerangs

Boomerangs have been part of Aboriginal people’s material culture for thousands of years, with the oldest known boomerangs being almost 10,000 years old, and are often called Australia’s national symbol. Museum anthropologist Philip Jones writes that the boomerang ‘has been used over and over in the long process of Australian identity formation, taking its place with the world’s great cultural symbols’. Boomerangs, however, are also ‘an important element of contemporary Aboriginal art, serving as “canvases” for individual artistic expression’. Crucial to this discussion is the fact that decorated boomerangs are an old art tradition and not just a product of tourism efforts or even cross-cultural encounters or

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28 Jones, Boomerang, 9.
30 Jones, Boomerang, 5.
31 Jones, Boomerang, 27.
colonial processes. In 1953, Tindale recorded rock art at Port Hedland that included '18 “plain” and 15 “decorated” boomerangs'. Rock art from this area is reportedly 10,000 years old, suggesting that decorated boomerangs are as old as the artefact itself. Furthermore, the diversity of designs in the Port Hedland record is quite extraordinary and should confirm that decoration is not a new modification.

One of the biggest hurdles in the consideration of boomerangs is the fact that boomerangs are often associated with travel souvenirs and the tourist industry in general. As already pointed out, Conroy experienced extreme reluctance from Queensland museums to collect anything filtered through QAC. The objects were seen as QAC objects and not objects that reflected Aboriginal identity or culture. As Ruhanen and Whitford write so eloquently, 'we must seek to gain a more wholistic [sic] understanding of the role Indigenous cultural identity and cultural representation plays in the sustainable development of cultural Indigenous tourism products'. Although QAC did not operate in any way like cultural tourism does, the concept of culture as commodity has a great deal of overlap between Indigenous tourism and QAC’s operations of mass production. Just as Bleakley tried to instruct communities on the proper shape of boomerangs, there is a sense that ‘Indigenous identity is often reconstructed to satisfy tourist expectations’.

Boomerangs need to be seen as representations of ‘the dynamic interaction between modernity and tradition’. The assertion that ‘tourism threatens Indigenous identity and culture’ also needs to be questioned. In curating Agency and Legacy, these concepts were challenged in various ways. The first method was to incorporate contemporary boomerang makers to illustrate the legacy of boomerang making and to include First Nation voices in the exhibition. The archives rarely name an artefact maker so including contemporary stories allows for artists to control some of the exhibition narrative. The second method was to showcase historical boomerangs in a way that asks visitors to rethink the artefact as a work of art.

In considering boomerangs as art, the exhibition highlights the range of painted images that boomerangs can carry. The exhibition also corrects the lack of awareness around how cultural knowledge and connection to country are facilitated by exploring boomerang production. Boomerang making is at the core of cultural continuity and those made for the tourist market are often heavily laden with cultural knowledge and the life experiences of Aboriginal peoples. It is not a question of ‘even tourist boomerangs’ have cultural meaning and importance as the implied hierarchy has no constructive place in discussions around contemporary artefact.

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37 Ruhanen and Whitford, ‘Cultural Heritage and Indigenous Tourism’, 183 and 182, respectively.
production. There are quality issues – some decorations are poorly executed and some constructions are hastily done. I want to set the issue of quality to one side, however, and highlight instead how cultural meaning and importance are imbued in boomerang production.

Garth Murgha and Estelle Tranby of Native Creations Australia have been producing artefacts for the Cairns tourism market for over 20 years. Before embarking on their own, they were part of the Deeral Aboriginal Co-op. Based in Babinda, a small community near Cairns in Far North Queensland, Deeral was one of many small supply hubs for QAC where local artists and artefact makers produced boomerangs and painted barks. Garth Murgha created boomerangs and artefacts for the Deeral Co-op while Estelle Tranby painted boomerangs and barks. All of these works were shipped to Brisbane for sale. She recalls that her colour palette was like many other palettes during that time and only utilised earth tones and natural ochre colours. Estelle’s colour palette has changed in the decades since and she now paints in a colour spectrum that reflects more of the vibrant life of the surrounding rainforests. Her paintings are now on canvas and full of colour, rendering aspects of Djabugay environmental and cultural life.

Boomerangs continue to be the cornerstone of Garth and Estelle’s economic stability. They use native timbers for their works emphasising the natural wood grain of the ironbark, wattle and gum trees they use. Despite the craftsmanship of both Garth’s fine wood working and Estelle’s artistry, the market still dictates aspects of their work. As noted elsewhere, the tourist market in Cairns only allows for a limited range of pricing on boomerangs – such works generally sell between A$20 and A$25 because that is what buyers are willing to spend. Highly crafted native timber boomerangs make up one part of their offerings but the market cannot always accommodate the associated costings. Garth and Estelle’s solution is to diversify by incorporating plywood boomerangs as part of their production. These fully painted plywood boomerangs provide the opportunity to produce a quality product while making the most of resources and time. However, I do not want to replace one hierarchy with another (native timbers over plywood). What is important to note here is the deliberate and economic choice to respond to the market in a thoughtful and considered manner. This response though is not without cultural considerations.

I have been buying boomerangs and artefacts from Native Creations Australia since 2010. Garth and Estelle are regular fixtures at the Cairns Weekend Markets, held every Saturday on the Esplanade. The Esplanade in Cairns is a strip several blocks long next to the inlet where the majority of tourists ‘hang out’ between their explorations of the rainforests and the Great Barrier Reef. The weekend markets themselves are a mix of the handmade and the mass-produced. Garth and Estelle’s outdoor stand

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38 Personal communication, 20 January 2020.
39 Stolte, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art*, 134.
is often the only First Nations stand selling locally made Aboriginal artefacts. For
over 20 years their stand has certainly been the most consistent presence. In 2019,
Garth, Estelle and I began working together to produce new understandings of
artefact production in Far North Queensland. When I was hired to curate Agency
and Legacy, I was eager to have them on board.

Garth Murgha is from the Gungandji tribe, located at Yarrabah, while Estelle Tranby
is from the Djabugay tribe near the Kuranda tablelands. Their company produces
multiple types of boomerangs including hook, returning, club and cross. Garth also
creates fire sticks, rainforest shields and swords. Garth does the wood manipulation
himself, salvaging the natural timbers from the rainforests surrounding his Babinda
home. In the beginning, the boomerangs and artefacts were all hand carved but
demand increased so much that an industrial-sized bandsaw was needed to keep
up with the over 200 boomerangs sold each month. Estelle Tranby paints designs
on the artefacts that reflect her own traditional bush medicines, life on country and
ceremonies. Artefacts made from native timbers are painted minimally in order to
highlight the beauty of the wood grain. Estelle learned to paint from her father
Enoch Tranby and through the creation of ‘piecework’ while participating in artefact
production through the Deeral Aboriginal Co-op. Piecework included boomerangs
but also small portable paintings, easily carried home by overseas tourists. Together,
Garth and Estelle make a powerful team, creating well-crafted works for purchase.
Their inclusion in the exhibition is part of a larger strategic concept of rethinking
boomerangs and their cultural significance in Queensland. This rethinking is helped
through the exhibition layout.

In planning Agency and Legacy, a smaller space off from the main gallery at the
UQ Anthropology Museum was ideal for highlighting and providing focus for
a rethinking of boomerangs (Figure 5). From the very beginning, I felt that the
three walls of this space were perfect for telling the story of artefact production by
situating the boomerangs as artworks and objects of agency.

The first wall of the back gallery is filled with undecorated QAC boomerangs, many
by unnamed artists. Shipments of artefacts would be sent down to Brisbane and
sold to tourists. Money would be sent back to the communities and redistributed to
artisans, encouraging further production. Because of this process of reimbursement
between QAC and communities, the State Archives has few details about the
boomerang makers. However, that does not mean that we know nothing about these
artisans. Despite the many mandates surrounding the proper shape of a boomerang
dictated by QAC in the early years, the shapes of boomerangs are hardly uniform.
Aboriginal craftspeople produced a variety of boomerang styles that we can read as
forms of agency against those mandates. This first wall was dedicated to showcasing
the agency that is the diversity of shape in boomerangs.
The third wall is filled with decorated boomerangs. (The second, centre wall is dedicated to shadow boxes, which will be discussed below.) As already mentioned, decoration is an old tradition for Aboriginal people and it should not be seen as modification for the tourist industry. The motifs may be modified for a tourist market but the tradition of painting boomerangs is not. Howard Morphy has written extensively about how Yolŋu bark paintings intended for sale are modified in order to remove the more secret and sacred components behind the imagery and stories being told through the act of painting. Unlike boomerangs though, bark paintings are highly valued and collected by museums and galleries. Many of the bark paintings displayed during the National Museum of Australia's blockbuster exhibition Old Masters: Australia’s Great Bark Artists were made to be taken out of Aboriginal communities and shared with a wider world. The reception of bark paintings though has been radically different from painted boomerangs. This third wall of the exhibition asks why that difference exists. Is it simply because boomerangs are mass produced?

40 See Morphy, *Becoming Art*.
41 Morphy, *Becoming Art*.
42 National Museum of Australia, *Old Masters*. 
Decoration codes boomerangs in different ways including the cultural, regional and personal. The shape of the boomerang poses a design challenge for artists, making decorated boomerangs a fascinating view into how those challenges are met. Cultivating an appreciation for decorated boomerangs, and how their production and sale helps sustain and promote cultural identities and ways of being, allows for a more nuanced understanding of Aboriginal artistic expression. In market engagements, artists meet and communicate with the general public who in turn learn first-hand about Aboriginal culture and history. Boomerangs continue to be a major doorway through which people engage with Aboriginal culture and peoples.

One of the boomerangs on display in the exhibition is a club boomerang crafted by Garth and painted by Estelle (Figure 6). The wood is black wattle (*Acacia mearnsii*), a native tree in the rainforests around Cairns. Garth and Estelle team up to tell stories and showcase their heritage through works such as this one. The club boomerang was an important tool for Aboriginal people and the painted design is of lawyer cane, an important resource in its own right. Lawyer cane (*Calamus caryotoides*) was (and continues to be) harvested for weaving baskets and bags and binding things together. The decoration of the club boomerang depicts the spikes of the cane along with their flowers and leaves – the dots being the fruit.
I bought this club boomerang at the Cairns Saturday markets in 2018. The meaning of the painting was explained to me as well as the wood type. Observing Garth and Estelle at the markets is a repeat of this same pattern. Visitors approach the stand and marvel at the array of works on display. They listen as Garth explains the different types of boomerangs and Estelle describes the meanings behind her paintings. Each are enthusiastic about their works as expressions of their cultural heritage. Garth is the more vocal of the two, easily engaging with all the visitors. Estelle is more quiet but is always ready to discuss her very detailed and well-thought-out paintings.

The importance of these exchanges cannot be underestimated. Tourists who visit Cairns come from all over Australia and all over the world. Aboriginal culture is often in the public view via outdoor events and festivals, museum exhibitions and cultural tours but direct one-on-one engagements are rare. Visitors do not always have the opportunity to casually talk to the First Nation peoples of Australia, nor do they have an agenda to do so. Research suggests that engaging with First Nation Australians is a low priority for tourists. Being part of a large marketplace allows for casual and spontaneous engagement and education. Garth and Estelle are representatives of their respective tribes but they are also putting themselves out there in the public for anyone curious about Aboriginal culture in Australia. Based on my observations at the markets, questions from visitors include queries on traditional foods, language names, traditional weapons and hunting techniques and, always, about the ‘meaning’ of artworks. People who are not inclined to go to a museum or pay for a tour get a short-course in Aboriginal culture through these market engagements. The value and importance of these cross-cultural engagements cannot be underestimated.

Decorated boomerangs and their sale at markets or through QAC should not be reduced to a mere economic exchange. We also need to reject the automatic assumption that there is a modification of culture to meet tourist expectations rather than the fulfilment of cultural needs of the artists. Cultures change and adapt, and our analysis of decorated boomerangs needs to as well. In communicating with the public, Garth and Estelle utilise the space to communicate their cultural heritage while sustaining their family economically. It is not performance as some write, but is instead a form of commodified persona, protecting the Indigenous self while communicating enough to educate and entertain. Boomerangs like Garth’s and Estelle’s and indeed all the decorated boomerangs in Agency and Legacy facilitate and have facilitated cultural exchange and cultural continuity. This point is emphasised through a short video documentary. Juxtaposed with the

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46 Bunten, ‘Sharing Culture or Selling Out?’, 382.
boomerang wall, interviews with contemporary makers allow them to tell their stories and show their processes. This documentary connects the past and the now, the process and the product.

**Shadow boxes**

Boomerang manufacturing produced an innovative offshoot of artefact production – the shadow box. First crafted in Cherbourg and then Hope Vale and Babinda, they are an amazingly creative use of artefacts and are highlighted in the exhibition on the second, centre wall of the small gallery (Figure 5). Shadow boxes are composed of various artefacts depending on the preferences of the maker. These artefacts include smaller, often miniature, shields, spears, rainforest swords, woomeras (spear throwers) and various boomerangs including hunting, club and returning. Although not the only artists working in this tradition, Cherbourg artists Jack O’Chin, Arden O’Chin and Joe Skeen popularised the shadow box form. Joe Skeen and his family were heavily involved in boomerang production and his shadow boxes are robust examples of the medium (Figure 7). There are several stylistic differences as each artist puts their own spin on them. Some shadow boxes used delicate interpretations of artefacts while others preferred thicker articulations. Hope Vale artists had their own interpretation entirely, making their shadow boxes based on shields topped with spears and boomerangs. Most shadow boxes were elaborately painted with the artefacts made of either native woods or readily available plywood.

Shadow boxes are a uniquely Queensland creation, reflecting both the legacy of the commercial efforts of QAC as well as the artistic agency of the artists involved. Since the late 1980s, the making of shadow boxes ceased but in 2019, Garth Murgha and Estelle Tranby decided to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair by making a series of shadow boxes. Inspired by their Elders, who were also part of QAC’s curio production, Garth and Estelle revisited the shadow box with their own interpretation on the tradition. Each artefact has been individually carved and joined by Garth, the process of designing the shadow box taking some time and experimentation (Figure 8). Garth grew up with his Uncles making shadow boxes and his creations are meant to be both a homage to their processes as well as an opportunity to develop his own unique approach. After assembly, the artefacts are painted by Estelle. Each animal depicted represents life in the rainforests while the shadow box style continues the innovative tradition that began decades earlier.

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47 Aird, *Brisbane Blacks*.

48 There are a few shadow box ‘blanks’ held at the Queensland Museum but these are rare pieces as shadow boxes are meant to be highly decorated.
Figure 7: Exhibition introduction wall showing some of the range of QAC objects including (left to right) a Joe Skeen shadow box, two Joe Skeen boomerangs and an Ardin O’Chin shadow box. Various collections including private, UQ Anthropology Museum and the Queensland Museum.

Source: Photograph by Mick Richards.

Figure 8: Garth Murgha laying out the various miniature artefacts that make up his shadow boxes, 2020.

Source: Photograph by the author.
Figure 9: Shadow box crafted by Garth Murgha and painted by Estelle Tranby, 2019. Black wattle wood with acrylic paint. Private collection.
Source: Photograph by Carl Warner.
The result of their efforts is indeed an original interpretation of the shadow box concept with one that is taller and narrower than others on display (Figure 9). Garth and Estelle write about the importance of shadow boxes themselves in order to communicate their cultural value to visitors:

The shadow box represents and highlights our connection to our land and sea country. Physically and spiritually, the traditional artefacts attached to the shadow box are an important part of our cultural and traditional history as rainforest and saltwater people. These artefacts connect us to the rainforest because they are made from the basic raw materials that we have access to but it also connects us to the sea because of the tools and weapons we make from the rainforest trees. This helps us hunt for food on the reef. The boomerang, clapsticks and spears are used for hunting and dance ceremonies that are sacred. The shadow box is believed by our people as a representation of ‘Luck’, bringing us many blessings.

Their statement hangs next to their shadow box in the exhibition in order to communicate the cultural importance of the shadow box. This shadow box can be broken down into three layers of cultural artefacts. The back layer is composed of a single paddle flanked by two fish spears and two inverted club boomerangs. These are overlain by the second layer of two hunting boomerangs. The top layer, from top to bottom, comprises a returning boomerang, a woomera and rainforest sword. As Garth and Estelle write, a shadow box represents the cultural intersections of the sea and the rainforest. The motifs painted on each artefact extend this symbolism and include a barramundi, a crocodile, a sea snake, lawyer cane and people dancing. Garth and Estelle’s shadow box and shadow boxes in general are inherently multivalent objects imbued with historical, cultural and social symbolism.

The creation of shadow boxes arose from QAC’s boomerang industry. Ultimately though, they are the product of the ingenuity of the artists and their creativity, illustrating the high level of agency enacted by First Nations peoples living under these policies.

**Broader issues of authenticity**

The act of curation has the potential to create new information as well as express a vision of artistic presentation. The challenges for Agency and Legacy included developing an exhibition that was neither completely aesthetic nor completely ethnographic. In curating the QAC exhibition, one of the main challenges was the complex history surrounding all the objects created under its auspices. Selecting contemporary works to be displayed alongside historical ones was a method of bringing First Nation voices like Garth’s and Estelle’s into the gallery space. Many of the historical works in the exhibition such as strung necklaces, pottery,
carvings and paintings sit next to their contemporary counterparts. These careful juxtapositions draw out the legacy of QAC’s policies and actions but also the agency, self-determination and innovation of the artists both 50 years ago and today.

Agency and Legacy provided a platform for rethinking many aspects of artefact production in Queensland and the exhibition challenges visitors to see works in a new light, particularly boomerangs. Much has been written about the scientific principles of the boomerang. Their value in that regard is well-documented. Other writings around boomerangs focus on their ethnographic or archaeological value. When discussing the economic value of boomerangs, the focus is on fake importations from overseas. But boomerangs as art is slow to be understood. A key aim of Agency and Legacy was a re-examination of the boomerang as more than a tourist object for sale. Boomerangs are multivalent objects that need to be treated and considered as such.

The value of artefacts can be considered in several ways, including ‘through the very process of their collection, documentation, movement, and flow through various hands’. In already existing collections in museums, the concept of the duplicate is determined ‘by distinctions such as place of collection and producer that are made by the collector as they document the collection’. Both of these considerations are external to the understandings of the makers. The mass production of an artefact is said to change the value of an object and ‘destroy the essence of the culture when the control of the cultural “product” is taken away from the Indigenous community’. However, Agency and Legacy argues that cultural commodification should be considered a dual process wherein ‘it is both an economic response to the global expansion of the service sector and a politically motivated expression of identity’.

Inauthenticity plagues artefacts made for sale, including claims that ‘local culture[s] are made inauthentic’ through commodity production. Bunten argues that such views ‘do not take in account the basic premise that cultural productions are not static entities, only ‘pure’ when untouched by outside influences’. Garth’s and Estelle’s experiences and understandings of their own boomerang production is based on a strong sense of cultural continuation and connection. Anthropologists know that ethnicity is a ‘social construction’ but our understanding of ethnicity is also less of what someone has and more of what someone does.

51 Ruhanen and Whitford, ‘Racism as an Inhibitor’, 1731.
52 Bunten, ‘Sharing Culture or Selling Out?’, 381.
53 Bunten, ‘Sharing Culture or Selling Out?’, 384, quoting Greenwood, ‘Culture by the Pound’.
54 Bunten, ‘Sharing Culture or Selling Out?’, 384.
This article has a large focus on boomerangs because, unlike shadow boxes or pottery, boomerangs for tourist sale are rarely considered for their artistic value or their cultural importance. The legacy of the tourism industry still hangs heavy over boomerangs with their affordability and mass production often preventing an understanding of their cultural value. Boomerangs do have an economic benefit, having provided income for Aboriginal artists for decades. Houses, cars, educational opportunities and retirement have all been funded by the making and selling of boomerangs. There is also an incredible cultural significance to boomerang production in Queensland. Aboriginal people who were removed from their country and their families reconnect to their ancestral ways through the making of boomerangs. Through market engagements, Aboriginal people are able to educate visitors about their ancient cultures and contemporary ways of being. Boomerangs are decorated with stories of hunting and gathering, of basket making and dancing, of special places, family designs and regional animals. These stories and ways of being are communicated through boomerangs. All of this is possible through the making and selling of boomerangs and Agency and Legacy recognises their cultural and historical value.

The idea of the tainted object is the problem I have addressed in this article. It creates a lens through which to look at the objects passing through QAC. The idea of the tainted implies the idea of the untainted. Instead of asking where the taint comes from, it is just as important to ask where the untainted comes from. Untainted objects are true to an expected form – a philosophical idea of a true boomerang or spear thrower. The untainted is located in the object. The tainted is located firmly in the maker. As John Conroy has said, museums and galleries did not want to even look at objects passing through QAC. The taint was with makers working through QAC’s doors. Boomerangs were being collected but not through QAC. Placing the taint solely on QAC still undermines the artists who were engaged in economic outcomes that helped them and their families.

An Indigenous person regardless of their background has a story. The true authenticity question should pertain to artistic expression rather than Indigeneity: it is not the degree to which an artist’s Indigeneity conforms with expectations but how the artist transforms their story into artworks and artefacts. That is the value and that is the authenticity of artists working for QAC. That is story that has been missing and the story Agency and Legacy tells. Instead of casting their ethnographic gaze at these forms of material culture, anthropologists should listen to the contemporary stories their makers are telling. A more solid understanding of the historical underpinnings of the makers, the government policies manipulating their modes of production and how they navigated structural limitations in the reception of their works needs to

56 Personal communication, 5 October 2019.
inform how we view these artefacts. The value of a boomerang needs to incorporate these aspects so that we can recognise the object’s forms of economic, cultural and social agency it encompasses.

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Book reviews
Songspirals: Sharing Women’s Wisdom of Country through Songlines
by Gay’wu Group of Women
x + 304 pp., illustrated, Allen & Unwin, 2019,
ISBN: 9781760633219 (pbk), $34.99

Review by Ann McGrath
The Australian National University

It is not very often a book comes along that I cannot stop quoting. Indeed, in writing this review, rather than interpreting the book in an academic style review, I was tempted to simply share appealing excerpts. Though it would be difficult to choose which ones, for there are so many.

Compiled by women about the region we know today as north-eastern Arnhem Land in northern Australia, Songspirals is a poetic exploration of Indigenous women’s ontologies. The nuances are so subtle and complex that I had mistakenly presumed that the non-Indigenous women of the collective were linguists drawing upon a rich knowledge of Yolngu vocabulary. Rather, they are three geographers. The other five women are Yolngu women generously willing to share their deep wisdom: Laklak Burarrwanga, Djawundil Maymuru and sisters Ritjilili Ganambarr, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs and Banbapuy Ganambarr.

Gay’wu means dilly bag, and the authors see the book as a place to keep important stories and memories, a container of cherished knowledge. In the telling of these stories, the authors are preparing, weaving and making Gay’wu. They compare it to the information represented in a painting and ceremony. The knowledge is familial, intimate, handed down from beloved kin.

This book is divided into five major songspirals or stories. There’s Wuymirri the Whale; Wukun, the gathering of the clouds; Guwak, the messenger bird; Wiritj, settling of the serpent; and Gong-gurtha, keeper of the fire. It ends with the wind.
In each section, ancient narratives are told in multisensory flashes of immediacy. In the telling, the stories become immanent in the present time, the everyday that the Gay’wu group currently inhabit. Yet, the concepts and the stories stretch out into a conceptualisation of eternal time, or another time dimension altogether, understandings of which the group is at pains to share with a wider audience through numerous patient expositions.

So what are ‘Songspirals’? They explain: ‘Songspirals are a university for us. They are a map of understandings’ (p. 33) and a ‘map of Country. We are seeing Country as we fly over it … we fly … like a bird … The vision of the ground from above, the landscape we travel past; our mind is like Google Maps, we see all through the song’ (p. 31). The song itself takes you to Country. If you are walking, it will find you the shortest route. It will connect the route with the stars. This is ‘a story, a big story’ (p. 16).

The Gay’wu open with Wuymirri, the story of whales and a great body of water (p. 16). It is ancestral and biographical, inspired by a much-loved elder who is about to pass away. She sees and experiences these stories, she is a character in them; she knows where her journey will take her and it will involve the ocean and the spirit forces within it. Wuymurri is a big whale story, but it involves a boat journey where the women feature ‘as whales and as ourselves’ (p. 16).

The process of sharing wisdom is intimate, autobiographical and emotional: ‘As we sing, as we cry milkarri, we tell a story. We tell of the contours of the land, the contours of ourselves’ (p. 31). They talk of tears that flow because the meanings are so deep; it is reciprocal – the land cries for her people and the people for the land (p. xxii).

This book reveals an encyclopaedic knowledge of a northern environment. As saltwater people, the Yolngu know water – they explain its many descriptors for tides, currents, muddy, clear, deep and shallow water, salt and fresh (p. 17). They are drawn to the Garma concept, the name given to the annual festival at Yirrkala; Garma means the people of the salt water and the fresh water mixing from far and wide. In turn, they use it as a metaphor that stands for two knowledges mixing and mingling (p. 17).

The Gay’wu collective step back from the Western concept of authorship. They explain: ‘Country is the keeper of the knowledge we share with you. Country gives the knowledge for this book. It guides us and teaches us. Country has awareness, it is not just a backdrop. It knows and is part of us’ (p. xxii). Interestingly, as yet another indication of their holistic ontology, the term Gay’wu stands for the name of the authors and for the book’s contents.
To summarise, if you want to learn about Aboriginal ways of loving and honouring their land, Country and kin, paying careful attention to the wise words contained in this book will be an education you won’t forget, for it is potentially transformative. The telling is dramatic, lyrical and awe-inspiring. It contains myriad important and sustaining concepts, stories and reflections. In these grim times, it will enable you to have renewed faith in the beauty and offerings of the world.
In the last couple of decades there has been a steady stream of research on the gendered history of missions and women’s place within them. *White Women, Aboriginal Missions and Australian Settler Governments: Maternal Contradictions* is the first full-length monograph on the subject in Australia and it brings important new interpretations to bear on that output. It sees missions as ‘maternal institutions’ within settler polities, performing ‘useful but fundamentally subordinate work’ (p. 177) as carers of Aboriginal people, and it explores how ‘maternal contradictions’ lead to fraught and complex relationships between missions, the state and Indigenous peoples. This is an ambitious project that the authors are well placed to tackle. Since the publication of *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Hawaii* in 1989, Patricia Grimshaw has written extensively on the gendered history of missions and their relationship with colonialism, and has supervised and mentored a wide range of projects in these fields. Joanna Cruickshank’s work in the cultural history of religion and spirituality makes her ideally suited for the close reading of official and personal Christian texts central to this book’s interpretations.

The authors argue that missionary maternalism was particularly strong in Australia because, unlike missionary sites in India, China and North America, where missionary schools and training colleges were established, the missionary home remained the kernel of missionary endeavour. In a context where there was ‘a foundational lack of land rights’ this gave missions a particularly close relationship with government protection regimes and meant that the ‘inequitable’ work of mothering constrained both missionary women and Indigenous peoples. The authors conclude that it was
women’s hard work that explains, at least in part, why Aboriginal people preferred missions to the violence of settler society and why they accepted missionaries as mediators; but women missionaries also participated in the destruction of Aboriginal cultures and could rarely provide ‘life-long commitment’ to child rearing.

The book does not attempt to be comprehensive but its broadly chronological arrangement of case studies reflects change and continuity over time as well as the range of ways maternal contradictions could operate: within marriages in the early colonies; among mothers and daughters in late nineteenth-century Victoria; for wives, widows and sisters in far north Queensland; single women in faith missions in New South Wales; religious refugees in the early twentieth-century south-east; and teachers and nurses in the north.

Perhaps the most compelling chapter narrates a series of ‘small encounters’ between two families of mothers and daughters – one white and the other Aboriginal – on Ramahyuck mission station, in late nineteenth-century Victoria. It is based on a rich collection of letters that makes the contradictions of the mission station vividly clear and deeply poignant. They suggest that ‘real affection’ could develop between white and Aboriginal women – indeed that Aboriginal women could ‘mother’ white women in some circumstances. But within the larger missionary context, Aborigines were on the receiving end of ‘mothering’ and resented its oppressive surveillance: in the memorable words of one young girl, they ‘watch us like a cat watching for a mouse’ (p. 62). In the longer term the race hierarchy that gave white woman authority left Aboriginal people exposed to a regime marked by bureaucratic regulation, shifting authority figures and the forced combining of different communities.

While the focus is on white women, the authors have mined the sources in order to discern the perspective of Aboriginal actors. The chapter that does this in the most sustained way traces the histories of those attracted to non-mainstream religions in the early twentieth century. It is generally assumed that there was little Aboriginal activism between 1900 and 1920 but Grimshaw and Cruickshank show how Aborigines in this period used the language and precepts of Christianity to criticise those who claimed to uphold it. Protectors were threatened by Aborigines who converted to Pentecostalism, fearing its enthusiasm and bodily expressiveness might encourage political activism. And though faith missionaries rarely supported activism against Protection Boards many of the Aboriginal activists of the 1920s and 1930s came from communities where faith missions flourished. The Day of Mourning was a rejection of missionary maternalism, even as its leaders drew on the language of Christianity and missionary networks.
By the mid-twentieth century, the contradictions within missionary maternalism had become extreme, as the conflicting narratives of Bill and Geraldine MacKenzie’s time at Aurukun in Queensland make clear. Within the missionary world, the MacKenzie were proponents of new more respectful waves of missiological thought, but to anthropologists their control of the mission through violence was anathema. The juxtaposition of these divergent depictions highlights the ultimate contradiction in missionaries acting as state officials by this time: protective legislation gave them such ‘extraordinary power’ over Aboriginal people’s lives that violence was normalised. As the authors note, the Moravians who founded the Queensland missions in the late nineteenth century would have been horrified to find that MacKenzie carried a gun.

The authors have presented copious evidence of the cramping effects of the mission-as-home, though some explanation of why this was characteristic of Australia would have further layered the text. But this is a deeply considered, sustained analysis that makes an important contribution, not just to the history of missions, but to the contested history of protection regimes. The stories are told without judgementalism but not without ethical judgement. In addition to fleshing out the impacts of individuals within these systems, they lay bare gross imbalances in the structures of power, how they were perpetuated and how they were sometimes subverted.
Over 30 years ago Thomas W. Laqueur published an influential essay called ‘Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative’ in Lynn Hunt’s edited collection The New Cultural History (1989). In it he argued that all manner of texts – case histories and autopsies were his focus – were vehicles for structures of seeing and feeling that induced empathic readers to embrace social improvement and even political change. In that compact essay, he offered not just a theory about the historical links between middling-class empathy and social reform but an argument about the presumptively liberal, even emancipatory, agency of the white Western witness to the crises and violences of modernity – an argument that scholars have been testing ever since.

Laqueur’s onlookers did not countenance empire and Laqueur himself has never taken the imperial turn. Nor did affect or emotion play an explicit role in his account. In her erudite and richly researched study, Jane Lydon illustrates how circulations of sentiment set in motion by imperial conquest and colonial settlement in an Anglo-Australasian world provincialise Laqueur’s early work, suggesting that anyone taking up the humanitarian narrative framework must reckon with its origins not just in empire but in white settler modernity writ large. Of particular urgency for Lydon is the necessity of coming to grips with how representations of Indigenous people and, where possible, the experiences and engagements of Indigenous communities themselves shaped the political effects that the drama of imperial emotions provoked. The book begins with the 1841 Rufus River massacre and ends with the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart and the Makarrata (reconciliation) Commission. In effect, Lydon is proposing that we understand the psychic life of empire not as immaterial to conquest and resistance, settlement and rebellion, but as a force that is utterly
consequential to how those histories unfolded over two centuries. It’s arguably the strongest claim made yet in empire history for the material work of emotion in the making (and the limits) of British imperial power.

Emotion is a big category and, in Lydon’s hands, it’s a capacious hold-all as well. Though empathy gets a lot of attention at the front end of the book, the anger and fear arising out of the violence and precarity of white settlement cannot but take centre stage. Lydon teases out how and under what conditions ‘imperialist nostalgia’ serves as a container for the good, the bad and the ugly in all their many temporalities. That the two main examples Lydon gives of such nostalgia turn on women – the so-called last Tasmanian, Truganini, and Nyoongar elder Fanny Balbuk Yooreel (pp. 48–49) – reminds us how entangled the empire of emotion was with gender and sexuality. Victimhood, ridicule, compassion, contempt and even admiration (all expressed through ‘virtuous tears’ [p. 81]) were shot through with the binary logics of masculinity and femininity in decidedly white anglophone modes. How and whether those modalities mapped onto indigenous ways of being is not taken up. Meanwhile, the class-based interests of a perpetually unsettled white settler capitalism are notable, as Lydon’s stage-setting story of Aussie humiliation on the TV show The News Quiz in 2013 underscores. What British jokes at Australians’ expense really signify is the liberal British Left’s ‘distaste for its own proletariat’. Lydon’s book details many such displacements and reorientations across the Australasian world she traverses. In a particularly astute analysis of responses to the Myall Creek massacre, she observes: ‘Framing frontier atrocity as convict crime allowed both colonists and humanitarians to displace their own complicity in Indigenous dispossession’ (p. 62).

Readers of Lydon’s earlier work will continue to be impressed by how deftly and compellingly she uses visual evidence to support her claims about how sentiment circulated and why the development of photography contributed to the creation and maintenance of grammars of racial difference. The still image moved across the white settler world via the lantern slide, carrying with it so many humanitarian narratives that we might speak of the globalisation of ‘telescopic philanthropy’ (p. 119) by the beginning of the twentieth century. As riveting are Lydon’s chapters on the antipodean circulation of two primers of reformist emotion, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Charles Dickens’s Bleak House. She follows both of these texts as they moved into the hands of white settler and Aboriginal reading communities, where they found different resonances but were absorbed and appropriated well beyond the sensation-loving Victorian era that generated them. It turns out that Stowe was a dense transfer point for knowledge of nineteenth-century US slavery for Aboriginal and white settler readers alike, with real effects for the ways that Aboriginal child removal was understood into the interwar period across the Pacific world. Bleak House, for its part, carried resentments against metropolitan reformist preferences for the uplift of distant Blacks over the white orphan closer to home.
This particular empathy contest is illustrated by an impressive range of interrelated images from the Victorian period that cultivated ‘not feeling sorry for Blacks’ (p. 117) through the pathetic figure of Jo the crossing-sweep boy, an urban icon competing for sympathy with Mrs Jellyby’s deserving Africans.

Lydon ends the book with a chapter on popular royalism, which takes up ‘Aboriginal ‘loyalty’ to the Crown’ (p. 170) from the 1820s down to the present. The discomfiture we may feel at the continuous history of Indigenous fidelity and, at times, submission to monarchical authority throws us back on the pain points we are inclined, perhaps, to avoid even as we are committed to decolonising originary humanitarian narratives. Happily, Lydon is fearless in the face of these challenges. And when it comes to the history of emotions and empire, she has given us an exemplar of the form.
There are certain touchstone moments that serve as a shorthand to demarcate one period from another. One such moment is W. E. H. Stanner’s 1968 Boyer Lecture in which he criticised settler Australia’s ‘cult of forgetfulness’ with relation to Aboriginal history.

Alison Holland sets out to dispel the historical myth that Stanner’s lecture marked the beginning of a self-critical public discourse on colonialism in Australia. Over the course of Breaking the Silence, her second monograph, she thoroughly and systematically reveals that, from the beginning of the twentieth century until the Second World War, Aboriginal and settler Australians alike inhabited a zeitgeist of constant and ‘deafening’ dialogue between administrators, who sought to govern Aboriginal lives, and the diverse and myriad Australians who spoke up in defence of Aboriginal interests as they saw them.

Indeed, Holland’s project contextualises Stanner’s claims about the ‘cult of forgetfulness’, pointing out that he was talking specifically about history books and that Stanner himself had been a vocal ‘defender’, as she terms people who spoke up in favour of Aboriginal people’s rights in the four decades after Federation.

At the book’s opening, the reader is presented with two vignettes and one proposition; the two stories detail parallel, life-saving acts of heroism, conducted 25 years apart by two Aboriginal men in the Northern Territory. While the first was publicly celebrated by the Commonwealth, the second was largely ignored. Holland’s proposition is that a heroic act in 1912 could earn an Alawa man named Mallyalega an Albert Medal for saving the life of a white policeman, while the 1937 rescue of an
Aboriginal boy with leprosy by Kancubina went unrecognised by the settler state. Holland asserts that this was because the pendulum of opinion in government had swung to the disadvantage of Aboriginal people in the intervening period, though she mentions in passing that it may also reflect the difference in the value placed on the life of a white policeman and that of an Aboriginal boy with leprosy.

The first three chapters detail the emergence of many settler Australians’ vocal opposition to the widespread exploitation and dispossession of Aboriginal people. The Roth report in 1905, and many others in the decades since, stimulated various settler Australian movements to establish land reserves for Aboriginal people.

The next three chapters explore the activism of white feminists, like Olive Pink and Mary Bennett, in their campaigns to protect the bodily autonomy of Aboriginal women, exercise ‘maternalist’ power over light-skinned Aboriginal children and install white women as Protectors of Aborigines. These campaigns generally failed, but efforts to stop police from being able to compel Aboriginal wives to testify against their husbands struck a chord with administrators and were successful.

The seventh chapter discusses the crescendo of debate between administrators and defenders in the late 1930s, before the Second World War brought an end to this fraught and conflicted era.

The final chapter attends to the activism of some Aboriginal people in the interwar period, especially William Cooper and William Ferguson. It concludes by pointing out that William Cooper ‘died in despair’, with most of the aims of Aboriginal defenders yet to be accomplished.

In this final chapter, Holland provides greater detail regarding the conditions experienced by Aboriginal people and its placement at this stage does produce a significant impact.

Holland makes sense of the deafening cacophony, often misguided and always louder than it was effective, around improving Aboriginal people’s lives. As such, Breaking the Silence can be read as a corrective against the belief that speaking out from the 1960s onwards broke from the past and signified, even constituted, some kind of emancipation from an ignorant colonial condition. In fact, ongoing repression has managed to coexist with a constant flow of speech, since at least Federation.

Reading the past with a hermeneutic generosity that is uncharacteristic in this field, Holland makes this history feel much closer than it has. Throughout the book, she embraces the complexity of controversial figures and their views and aims. She effectively summons this past into our present, notably when inviting parallels with the explosion of public discourse during the Reconciliation movement of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.
At the same time, Holland’s decision to favour a style of thick description sometimes comes at the expense of being able to reduce her arguments down to clearer and more powerful analyses. Chapters 4–6 are the clear exceptions, where she combines her rigorous historical scholarship and depth of research with a critique of white feminist advocates’ maternalism, as well as the patriarchal and colonial structures against which they struggled. Had more chapters hung together in this way, through the authorial assertion of a deeper principle at play than the fact of being incited to speech, then a more profound analysis might have been arrived at.

Ultimately, however, this book achieves its aim. It reveals a ‘cacophony’ of settler and Aboriginal Australian advocacy in the first four decades of the twentieth century – and it stands as a complex repository of discourse defending Aboriginal people. Replacing the common but lazy touchstone of a presumptive silence and a ‘cult of forgetfulness’ before Stanner’s 1968 lecture, *Breaking the Silence* poses a new set of questions for future scholarship of this period, including how and why so much goodwill and public discourse could have so thoroughly receded from view and left so little meaningful residue in concrete political gains.
‘We have survived’ is a reassuring and empowering mantra, often reinforced through the ‘welcome to country’ protocol. Now familiar across Australia, that protocol has served as a primary riposte to the notion that Aboriginal culture derives its authenticity from those generations located in a pre-European past. That said, recognition of contemporary Aboriginal structures of authority at public events often seems to rest upon the embrace of those very markers of authenticity – recited introductions in languages no longer spoken informally, smoking rituals and corroboree extracts based on the texts and observations of nineteenth-century ethnographers – which have, until recently, characterised museum exhibits. Contemporary protocols tend to convey an impression of unbroken continuities and beliefs. Perhaps nothing much has been lost; the centre holds after all, and colonialism itself has been just one more challenge thrown at an ancient, obdurate culture.

In an erudite and illuminating set of essays, written both by some of South Australia’s outstanding historians and by Aboriginal leaders relating their own family’s journeys of survival through and beyond the colonial era, this book gently reorients the reader towards a different reality. With perhaps one exception, the essays accumulate compelling evidence for another reading of Aboriginal history, in which the trauma, schisms and discontinuities caused by European colonialism triggered a set of responses which speak of Aboriginal agency, adaptation and survival. Linguist Paul Monaghan opens the book with a succinct, necessary overview of the ‘structures of Aboriginal life’ prior to colonisation in South Australia, before historians Peggy Brock, Tom Gara, Christine Lockwood, Skye Krichauff, Carol Pybus, Robert Foster and Amanda Nettelbeck take the reader through a series of chapters examining
the legacy of colonialism across the South Australian regions, from the first arrival of European sealers on coastal areas, to the encounters with Anangu people in the north-west of the state during the mid-twentieth century. Diane Bell’s chapter, which seems based more on ideology and advocacy than upon the historian’s craft of revelation through research seems the exception. One must turn back to Graham Jenkin’s *Conquest of the Ngarrindjeri* (1979) for a balanced analysis of policy and personal experience.

In recent times the discourse surrounding the Stolen Generation/s has tended to focus the attention of historians on institutional histories of missions and settlements, justifiably positioning Aboriginal people as victims, their autonomy destroyed through government, mission policy and an expanding ‘culture of dependency’, which decades of ‘self determination’ have not dispelled. South Australia’s principal colonial founders were certainly aware of Aboriginal property rights (albeit poorly understood) and had envisaged a harmonious, if unachievable accommodation with the colony’s Indigenous peoples. Small reserves in southern regions were created during the 1840s and 1850s on the assumption that Aboriginal people might adopt European agriculture, with their rights secured through the appointment of a Protector of Aborigines. As these ideals began to fail, and as Aboriginal people lost control over their lands and waters, this token ‘protection’ took on a practical aspect, with a rapidly expanding network of ration depots supplied by a government that still perceived a responsibility to compensate Aboriginal people for the losses they had suffered. Foster and Nettelbeck, Brock and Gara lay this sequence out in the opening chapters, noting that South Australia persisted in its appointments of a single, centralised Protector of Aborigines whose powers over Aboriginal lives steadily expanded, ultimately codified in the *Aborigines Act 1911*.

Most of the book’s case studies confirm the centrality of this Act in affecting the lives of South Australian Aboriginal people, perhaps for two key reasons involving the Protector’s almost untrammelled legal and administrative power. He could break up Aboriginal families with the stroke of a pen, and after 1911 the assumption of government authority over missions such as Point MacLeay, Point Pearce and Koonibba effectively turned their residents into incarcerated, second-class citizens. That legacy of disadvantage has affected almost all Aboriginal families in southern South Australia at least into the present day. In this respect, *Colonialism and Its Aftermath* tends to follow a well-trodden path, but perhaps its real value lies in the fact that most of its writers have also tapped into another lode – the lives of Aboriginal people who were not snared in the institutional net but were somehow able to fashion an independent existence, both before and after the Act. This is where one begins to perceive that contemporary Aboriginal identity does not rest on a quaint set of rehearsed rituals, but on the shared experience of riding the shocks and trauma of colonialism. In this respect, the short contributions to this book by Aboriginal people themselves (made independently or in partnership with
historians) resonate greatly. These vignettes contain powerful imagery of the way in which the colonised people of the Adelaide Plains, south-east, Yorke Peninsula, Murray and Lakes, Eyre Peninsula, Flinders Ranges, west coast, north-east and north-west of the state managed to fashion meaningful lives and to adapt on their own terms to an upended social reality. The vignette provided by Bunganditj man of the lower south-east Des Hartman resonates in this way. His account makes it clear that cultural details such as moiety affiliations and even the consciousness of ‘correct marriages’ can survive the trauma of unrestrained colonialism, with its triple serving of violence, disease and dispossession, into a present in which Hartman himself is playing a real role, particularly with the revitalisation of the language.

This book is the first concerted survey of what became of South Australia’s principal Aboriginal cultural groups since the colonial period. The commonalities between the chapters are instructive in terms of the traumatic effect of colonisation, but so also are the particularities of the strategies and compensations developed by Aboriginal people within the limits of autonomy they were able to preserve for themselves, both within and outside the confines of the ‘culture of dependency’ and state authority. This book could be a model for a series of fine-grained histories that acknowledge and explore that agency, founded less on vague memory of ethnographic authenticity and more on the diverse ways in which Aboriginal people have negotiated colonialism’s aftermath.
Meeting the Waylo: Aboriginal Encounters in the Archipelago

by Tiffany Shellam

xiii + 271pp., University of Western Australia Press, 2019,

Review by Grace Karskens
University of New South Wales

Tiffany Shellam’s first book, Shaking Hands on the Fringes, was a brilliant and eye-opening work that looked back at the white military garrison at King George’s Sound in Western Australia from the perspective of the King Na-yup. Now, in Meeting the Waylo, she has turned her attentive eye to another set of encounters, those ‘slippery transactions laced with danger, violence and forced friendships’, between the Aboriginal men who agreed to voyage with white explorers on British ships and the Waylo, the Aboriginal people of northern Western Australia. By unravelling and re-reading colonial records, and reconnecting them with ‘counter archives’ – that is, the ‘traces, inscriptions, markings, oral histories, songs’ left behind by the expeditions – Shellam has revealed these early explorations and their legacies in a startling new light.

Waylo was the name that southern Aboriginal people of Western Australia used for the unknown people living in the region north of the Swan River, strangers they feared as formidable giants. These stories, then, are about more than encounters between Aboriginal people and Europeans; they are also about encounters between Aboriginal people who were strangers to one another. But this time the perspective is not so much that of the ‘Waylo’ as of the Aboriginal intermediaries Migeo (from the Swan River region), Boongaree and Bundle (from the northern and southern Sydney region, respectively). Shellam is interested in the meetings themselves: the rituals and protocols, the unstable dance of encounter, and the utterly divergent motivations and worldviews of the white and Aboriginal explorers, and in the unfolding legacies of these meetings.
The book is elegantly structured in five parts. The introduction explores the construction of colonial archives, framing three sections successively examining the experiences of Migeo, Boongaree and Bundle. A set of concluding chapters meditate upon the implications for Australian history, offering powerful insights into historical practice and Shellam's own collaborative work with the Yaburara, Ngarluma, Yindjibarndi and Woo-Goo-To-Oo people of the Pilbara, whose guidance framed her analysis of rock art and oral history especially.

First Nations people worldwide argue that their history does not exist wholly in the archives of their oppressors, and archives are themselves instruments of dispossession, exploitation and racism. Yet it is by returning to such records – carefully unravelling them, reading against the grain of colonising mindsets, reconnecting them to those other traces, and setting them once more in the great sweep of Western Australian coastal landscapes – that Shellam has recovered these lost Aboriginal-centred histories.

For it is clear that these archival records did not originally exclude Aboriginal people – they were named and their actions recorded, sometimes in extraordinary detail. It was in subsequent processes of rewriting, editing, archiving that they were erased from ‘history’. Polished published accounts in particular were literally reshaped to diminish or exclude the roles of Aboriginal people. Descriptions were edited out, incidents rewritten and reinterpreted, and then documents were mislabelled and misfiled, sketches hidden away in private albums, artefacts separated from the fact of their violent theft. By reconstructing the whole spectrum of history making, both European and Aboriginal, Shellam offers a salutary lesson on the colonialist nature of the archive, but also reveals the precious riches held in archives and museums, and how they can be seen anew.

Like Shaking Hands on the Fringes and a number of other recent collaborative studies, Meeting the Waylo offers a new kind of Australian history, and a way forward in the project of decolonisation and the truth-telling required for Makarrata. Shellam is deeply attentive to culture, ritual, emotional lives and spirituality – that is, to all the things that mattered most to Aboriginal people. If we are to break out of the colonial, Western and strictly ‘rational’ ways of thinking that so often dismiss these aspects of human life, this is how to do it.
This interdisciplinary work provides a comprehensive and detailed study of five public song series sung for entertainment by the Gurindji people of Aboriginal songs from Wave Hill (Kalkaringi), Northern Territory. It is part of the series Indigenous Music of Australia, edited by Linda Barwick, that analyses the repertoire of traditional and traditionally oriented songs, such as the work of Yothu Yindi, that are sung in Australian Aboriginal languages. This is the first book within that series to examine songs with desert origins, as the others concentrate on music from the Top End of the Northern Territory. A website, open.sydneyuniversitypress.com.au/songs-stations.html, is available with audio recordings of all of the songs that are presented for analysis in the book. The intention of the authors is to help people to learn the songs by listening to the recordings and matching each verse to the rhythmic patterns and to the melodies shown by the notations. Because the melodies of each song set are roughly the same, only few notations are shown; unfortunately there are none for Freedom Day, which historically will be of special interest to the reader. That song set celebrates the seven-year strike by the Gurindji people against the international food company Vestey’s for wages and improvement in living conditions that is popularly known as the Wave Hill walk-off. The strike action, led by Vincent Lingiari, hastened the movement towards land rights in the Northern Territory (pp. 7–10).
Throughout the book, Gurindji people's voices are heard through historical accounts and reminiscences. First of all, the singer Ronnie Wavehill gives a detailed account of the place of *wajarra* singing within the context of Gurindji ceremonial and social life, citing his own memories of how he learned the songs. The bilingual format of his narrative, which must have taken very painstaking work, is useful both for Gurindji people and for English-speaking readers; however, a recording of it would have been of special interest to the Gurindji listener.

Next, the reader will enjoy the personal observations by Gurindji people found within the analytical commentaries after most verses of the five *wajarra* song sets. These include comments about references to sites, dance steps, bush foods, historical references, and elaborations on the meanings of some of the song words. For example, on page 126, Ronnie Wavehill comments upon family connections and dance procedures of verse 4 of the Mintiwarra song set, ‘Makurila’:

*warlpi-warlpila* reminds him of his uncle, whose name was *Wayitpiyarri* (Hector Jangari). Ronnie Wavehill remembers that during this song, all of the women get up and go a long way away and let the men dance. They are only allowed to hear from a distance.

On pages 164–65, several people commented upon verse 1, ‘Warriwankankanya’ of the Laka song set:

At Balgo, Patrick knew this song and he recounted hearing an aged white stockman in Alice Springs sing it when he and Marie visited Alice Springs in the 1990s ... Patrick jokingly said that the white stockman stole a blackfella song and Marie humourously retorted that Patrick stole the stockman’s Slim Dusty. Jimmy Tchooga remembered this song from Gordon Downs Station. At Bililuna, Jack and Marie Gordon said that men and women danced to this song with their hand behind their backs.

A creative comparison is made about artistic practice. On page 24, the authors discuss the point that although Aboriginal people may sing songs with words that they cannot understand, they appreciate the musical features along with the historical and contextual associations. They compare this practice to appreciation of abstract art, which is valued for its visual qualities rather than its intrinsic meaning.

The analyses, both linguistic and musical, are detailed and comprehensive. With this in mind, some statements need a bit more elaboration if they are to keep up the analytical standard of the rest of the book. For example, on page 4, the authors say that the same song is performed to different melodies in different performances. Does this refer to the text only? May the melody differ during the same performance? Also, it would be helpful to give an example or two about the point made on page 1 of the Introduction where the authors state that ‘songs may originate locally but they also travel, where they are picked up by different people and sung with a local touch’. Conceptually the point may seem clear, but it would be good to have...
some data showing comparisons. A final point may be made about the section, ‘Abbreviations, terms and conventions’. Most concepts are covered, but a definition of ‘small song’ at the beginning under musical organisation (p. xxxvii) would be logical. The concepts of ‘song’, ‘verse’ and ‘small song’ are, indeed, discussed next to the table; however, these could be discussed earlier in order to clarify their meanings.

A few editorial errors have slipped through, such as misspellings of Pintupi in footnote 11 on page 34, and the second paragraph on page 102 that refers to six song sets where there are five shown in Figure 2.2. Some of the references at the end of the book are not consistent in form, such as on page 208 with the 1987 entry on Merlan’s chapter in the book, *Songs of Aboriginal Australia*, indicating MC Ross as one of the editors, however, the Sutton chapter in the same volume shows the name as M Clunies Ross. Also, the order of authors’ names should be changed for several other references. These are only minor errors within a comprehensive bibliography that is impressive in its scope and of great use to researchers.

Overall, the depth of the analyses and attention to detail make this work an important contribution to the fields of history, linguistics and ethnomusicology. The general reader will see how all aspects of Gurindji culture intertwine, resulting in a most sophisticated world view. Ethnomusicologists, especially, will learn from the careful method used in musical analysis. The book shows a positive and joyful side of the Gurindji people of Kalkaringi through song and celebration of their culture.
Skin, Kin and Clan: The Dynamics of Social Categories in Indigenous Australia

edited by Patrick McConvell, Piers Kelly and Sébastien Lacrampe

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Review by Francesca Merlan
The Australian National University

Skin, Kin and Clan arose out of the second phase of a project called ‘Austkin’ funded by the Australian Research Council and based at The Australian National University. Its first phase focused on recording and cataloguing Australian Aboriginal kin terminologies, the classification of kinship systems, and historical-linguistic analysis of relations among kin terms and social categories. This volume deals with the history of documentation of social categorisation in Australia, and interrelationships among forms of social categorisation – sections, subsections, semi-moieties, phratries, kinship and marriage rules and practices. A number of the chapters deal critically with aspects of these traditional objects of Aboriginalist study, while most of the chapters investigate the developmental histories of kinship terminologies and social category systems. The core concern of the project’s second phase, as the title indicates, was the historical development and dynamics (especially spatial diffusion) of kinship and social category systems. Several of the chapters exemplify use of historical-linguistic analysis to clarify relationships among forms of social categorisation, while others foreground questions of the factors that condition their development.

Following a useful Introduction to chapters in the volume, in a first chapter, Piers Kelly and Patrick McConvell trace a history of (outsiders’) understanding of Aboriginal social categories. Initial shaping in social evolutionist terms was followed by (partial) challenges to this in the twentieth century, and particular impetus has been given to study of kinship and social systems by land rights since the 1960s.
Chapter 3 by Laurent Dousset examines patterns and changes in mappings of Australian social categories (moieties, clans, and so on) – crystallisations of ideas about social forms (and Indigenous society) at particular times. Dousset demonstrates a shift from more bounded to more dynamic cartographic representations.

In Chapter 4 Raymond Madden examines arguments about western Victorian ‘clans’, from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sources (Dawson, Howitt) to more recent ones. He shows how the idea of clans as ‘matrilineal’ became established though the evidence for this is equivocal. The chapter points to the complexity of application of different forms of interpretation (oral and written) to accounts of Indigenous social organisation, intensified in the present period in which Indigenous groups have a keen interest in the ethnohistorical and other documentary accounts of their ancestral groups.

In Chapter 5 Mark Harvey, aiming to compare disputation over kinship and marriage claims with disputation over claims to land in western Arnhem Land, attempts reconstruction of systems in both domains.

Chapter 6 by Harold Koch, the late Luise Hercus and Piers Kelly focuses on six sets of moiety names from the east of South Australia to Central Victoria. They show that the distribution of these famous ‘Eaglehawk and Crow’ and other similar terms does not correlate closely with language. They infer that these sets have spread by diffusion from formerly highly populated regions of the Murray and Darling rivers following the diversification of languages.

In Chapter 7, using notes of Daisy Bates and Radcliffe-Brown, Peter Sutton examines the evidence for patriclan sets or ‘phratries’ in the Ashburton district of Western Australia, and compares them with analogous forms in other parts of the continent. The material illustrates the significance of categories that, though grounded in patrilineal localism, also cross-cut it and created wider regional categories perhaps comparable to groupings such as sections elsewhere.

In Chapter 8 Patrick McConvell follows up his considerable earlier work on the origins of subsections, examining the origins of section systems in Australia’s central north. He sees them as arising from modifications in marriage rules and territorial associations of earlier systems of patrimoieties categories, and proposes a geographic location of such changes.

In Chapter 9 McConvell and Maïa Ponsonnet examine the ‘colexification’ (additional senses) of terms for Indigenous language terms for the category of ‘subsection’, showing that a large proportion have to do with smell, flavour, body, head, name and other aspects of the person. They suggest a location of origin for colexification with (English) ‘skin’ in the northern Arnhem coastal Iwaidjan languages, thence
into the pidgin around the Cobourg Peninsula (where there was an early British settlement). Designation of ‘subsections’ as ‘skins’ was not formerly general usage in Aboriginal English and Kriol, but now has become so.

In Chapter 10 Harold Koch exemplifies how to deploy historical-linguistic analysis, especially close examination of sound changes, to document the relative timing and adoption of subsection terms into Arandic languages.

In Chapter 11 Tony Jefferies argues for the significance in Indigenous social systems of the ‘close–distant’ kin dichotomy. While the importance of this distinction seems beyond doubt, clearer analysis of the dimensions that constitute its terms, socially and spatially, is needed. Some matters presented as relevant to the close–distant dichotomy, such as terminological generation merging in relation to clans, are not clearly shown to be so.

In Chapter 12 Mary Laughren performs detailed analysis of comparable sex- and generation-marking ‘anomalies’ in Waanyi (Gulf of Carpentaria), Warlpiri (Central Australia) and other kin terminologies, examining what might condition them. She rejects a first hypothesis that they can be related to wife exchange and bestowal patterns, but distils some shared features of the terminological systems of the southern Gulf of Carpentaria region along the way.

In the final chapter, Joe Blythe examines the rise of trirelational locutions – ones that encode relations among three persons; roughly, speaker, addressee and a third person – in Murrinhpatha, similar (but not the same as) ‘trirelational’ kin terms documented in various parts of Australia. Calling these ‘incipient’ lexicalisations, Blythe argues that constraints on personal reference, particularly prohibitions on the use of personal names in the context of society-wide kinship, provide the crucial condition. This, I would suggest, treats a need for use of personal names as too determinate; but Blythe’s research methods are interestingly illustrated.

This is a brave effort. Nowadays, treatment of complex kin and category systems is often considered arcane, though it used to be a main part of Aboriginalist studies. Many students of Australian Indigenous social systems today would be hard put to understand some, or parts, of these chapters. They are certainly written in a way that would be beyond the grasp of many people in most Indigenous communities – including those from which the original material came. That is not said as a criticism, but in recognition of a big difference between material treated analytically and that ‘same’ material as the substance of everyday practice. Nevertheless, these chapters show how material of these kinds, some of it older documentation, can be made to address new questions, or old questions in new ways. Principal among such questions is consideration of diffusion of systems across the Australian continent – one principal sense of ‘dynamics’ in the collection. Diffusion raises further questions of social process in relation to Aboriginal Australia, both precolonial and
inextricably linked to colonial incursion. With few exceptions, the conditions and causes of mobility and change are not the subject matter of this volume. Nor would the application of this material to land and native title cases, for example, be simple or straightforward, oriented as it is to dynamism and change in social categorisation. The collection carves out a niche for itself in presenting analyses of categorisation and social structure that illuminate change and contribute to questions that these analyses might help to address.

As always with ANU Press, an ebook version is available free online, and a paperback version can be purchased as print on demand.
Indigenous Rights and Colonial Subjecthood: Protection and Reform in the Nineteenth-Century British Empire

by Amanda Nettelbeck


Review by Tim Rowse
Western Sydney University

This is a study of the ideas and practices of British colonial administration – mostly in the six Australian colonies up to the early twentieth century. With due attention both to extensive scholarship and primary sources, Nettelbeck brings two valuable framings to this much studied topic: her comparisons within the six Australian colonies, and her interest in the connection between Aboriginal protection and British efforts in other parts of the Empire to regulate slavery, indentured labour conditions and the living conditions of certain ethnic communities. Her many comparative digressions touch on the West Indies, Mauritius, New Zealand, Canada, the Straits, Cape Colony and Natal. Her theme is that although the British conferred legal rights on the various kinds of non-white, non-settler, 'vulnerable subjects', the rule of law policed 'the terms of their own lawful conduct, the conditions of their employment and the scope of their movement' (p. 29). These 'subjects' were formally equal to all other subjects of the Empire, but practically marginal and subordinate.

Her story begins with the Imperial recognition that the unruliness of white settlers was a problem, as the 1837 Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements) (or 'Buxton Report') acknowledged. Postulating the natives' rights as British subjects was part of the corrective, but colonised people would have to change in order to live up to that status and to benefit from the law's protection. Thus, while protection was tutelary of both colonists and colonised, the cultural difference of colonised made it more practically difficult for protectors to bring them within effective jurisdiction. Previous experience in the protection of slaves and indentured labour made British officials such as Herman Merivale
confident that non-white peoples could be protected, if the right men were appointed as Protectors. Theorists of colonial rule such as Saxe Bannister (New South Wales Attorney-General 1824–26) envisaged an administration at whose local level ‘colonial officials would work as regional “agents” together with indigenous counterparts to establish local terms of justice and good government’ (p. 37); he even envisaged treaties. Buxton’s outline of Protectors’ duties towards Aboriginal people eschewed treaties and fell short of Bannister’s vision.

In the Australasian colonies Protectors of Aborigines were appointed from the 1830s to devise context-sensitive practices of exposing Indigenous peoples to the rule of British law, and by 1840 there were four departments of Aboriginal protection in the Antipodean colonies. Indigenous people would be exempt from laws criminalising vagrancy. There was much debate about whether they should be allowed to swear the truth of their evidence in court, and some colonies made this possible earlier than others. Colonies differed also in the civilising role that they assigned to employment. Signing a treaty and purchasing land (the New Zealand experiment) left open the question ‘of how much and how soon [Māori] should be considered amenable to British law’ (p. 44). Land theft, martial law and removal (the Tasmanian experiment) left open the question of how to care for and ‘improve’ those removed. The most difficult ‘protection’ to practise was when Aboriginal Australians were killed or harmed by colonists or by other Aboriginal people; the colonists were politically effective in presenting themselves as defending person and property, while criminal acts *inter se* were arguably subject to an Aboriginal jurisdiction that, in principle, did not exist in Australian colonies.

Many officials who faced these problems as Protectors are mentioned by name, their practices and ideas briefly described, in Nettlebeck’s deft, economical narrative. No previous monograph has covered so many Antipodean players and scenes in such detail as she provides. Her theme of local discretion is thus richly illustrated. The gross differences between colonies she summarises as ‘dispute adjudication and land brokerage’ in New Zealand, ‘salvage’ of the rapidly dispossessed in the Port Phillip District, ‘impartial justice and labour management’ in South Australia, and in Western Australia labour management and policing that resulted in much incarceration (p. 99).

Perhaps it is partly because protection turned out not to be ‘a coherent or uniform policy’ (p. 65) that it threw up certain intermediaries who could function without formal legal authority; these men are relevant to Nettlebeck’s theme of law’s effective limits. Some of them were Indigenous, others were colonists of atypical knowledge and interest, including missionaries and pastoralists; she acknowledges the inspiration of Richard White’s study of the North American ‘middle ground’. Formal legal authority wielded by Protectors employed by the Crown is nonetheless her main theme.
Protection was intended not only to defend the colonised from harms but also to educate them towards ‘colonial citizenship’ (p. 139). Nettelbeck argues that if Aboriginal people found that British law could be worked to defend their interest, Protectors’ educative mission stood a better chance of success. She has much to say about strategic ‘intimacies’ between officials and Aboriginal people. Some Protectors rationed food; for people whose food-gathering was so disrupted this was a lasting and effective practice, but as Elkin was later to observe (‘intelligent parasitism’) this modus vivendi did not require much change in the outlook of the recipients. Protector patronage also took the form of creating a native police force; that strategy alienated some from the Crown even as it bound others to service. Some Protectors engaged with Aboriginal people when selecting lands that were reserved for their use. In South Australia and New Zealand cross-cultural marriages were encouraged. When Protectors were given magisterial powers they were both prosecutors and defenders of Aboriginal people.

Protectorates had been wound down in Australia and New Zealand by the 1850s (though what some esteemed the most successful innovation of the Port Phillip Protectorate – the Native Mounted Police – lasted (scandalously) for the rest of the nineteenth century in New South Wales, Queensland and episodically in South Australia). By 1860, Nettelbeck suggests, ‘the promise of civil improvement [of Indigenous persons?] underpinned by law no longer held the same kind of political currency’ (p. 164) and so in the Australian colonies protection was more and more realised through programs of ‘welfare and labour management’ (p. 165). She illustrates this thesis by describing the reserves established in Victoria, the Protectors’ distribution of rations and blankets in South Australia, ‘official neglect’ in New South Wales (p. 167) until 1883, official neglect coupled with the recruitment and deployment of native police in Queensland, labour regulation in Western Australia and the declaration of Cape Barren Island as a reserve for Tasmanian Aboriginal people in 1881. Many Aboriginal people survived as labourers on pastoral leases and some took up farming (including under mission patronage at New Norcia and Poonindie).

What was lost from ‘protection’ in the second half of the nineteenth century, she suggests, was political support for ‘compensatory Aboriginal justice’ (p. 168) and ‘the concept of indigenous justice embedded in equal rights’ (p. 170). As the terms ‘compensation’, ‘rights’ and ‘justice’ are not indexed, it is not possible to check systematically how policy and practice embodied those ideals up to 1860. Nettelbeck’s discussion of South Australia’s approach to reserves (the strongest example of an official attempt at ‘compensatory justice’) suggests that no Australian colony had ever paid more than lip service to an idea worthy of the label ‘compensatory justice’. South Australia increasingly rented its Aboriginal reserves to farmers, devoting the income to buying rations for private distribution. Perhaps the change in ‘protection’ that Nettelbeck is pointing to is better conveyed by saying that, after responsible
government, a colonial liberalism emerged that honoured the small landowner and the employee: to the extent that Indigenous subjects could present themselves (or be represented discursively) as people who worked the land and/or who were in ‘employment’ their interests could be ‘protected’ to some degree. One of the earlier contending theories of protection was that it would work best by attaching Aboriginal people productively to the economy. That vision increased in practical significance as the Australian colonies spread out and flourished economically, Nettelbeck’s final chapter illustrates this amply, referring to the five mainland colonies, and this is where her knowledge of labour regulation elsewhere in the British Empire is most pertinent. The career of Governor Frederick Napier Broome (pp. 182–83) is a good illustration: he served in the administrations of Natal, Mauritius, Western Australia and Trinidad.

When Nettelbeck writes that ‘the combination of race privilege and economic entitlement was strengthening everywhere in the late-nineteenth century British Empire’ (p. 184), she is reminding us that this was a capitalist empire. Nettelbeck’s book is much inspired by recent scholarly interest in the legal sinews of the British Empire, and her major thesis is that protection policy, inspired by certain ideas of justice, strove successfully for the Imperial state’s ‘governmental coherence within an increasingly mobile Empire’ (p. 3). She does not say what was ‘mobile’, and I think she may be referring to people, which is certainly so. However, even more mobile than people was finance: the underlying point of Imperial governance was to secure land and labour in the territorial expansion of British capital. Protection secured capital (especially in the form of land purchased or stolen from indigenous people) and state authorities sought to manage the reproduction of labour, not all of which was sourced by migration.

The stories told by Nettelbeck are part of a wider trend in historical writing that reframes Australia’s ‘frontier wars’ within themes of state formation and legal experimentation. This reframing highlights the tensions and contingencies of the triangular relationship between government, settler and colonised – requiring a more complicated cast of ‘invaders’ and giving rise, in this book, to many important stories about Australian Protectors’ improvisations. This attention to law and administration also highlights Nettelbeck’s question: how did their subjection to colonial law remake Indigenous persons as subjects? Referring, I think, to the late nineteenth century, Nettelbeck says that Indigenous Australians ‘occupied a state closer to postponed than clarified British subjecthood’ (p. 197). The word ‘postponed’ raises the question of when Nettelbeck should end her story. How should historians periodise ‘protection’? Did subjection to protective law ever result in ‘clarified’ British subjecthood? If it did not, what aims and methods replaced ‘protection’, and did such ‘post-protection’ policies bring clarity to the subjecthood of Indigenous Australians?
Although Nettelbeck remarks that protection statutes and departments endured until the 1960s (p. 199), in the substance of her narrative she chooses to end her story in 1937, when two things relevant to her story happened. First, William Cooper organised a petition to the King to remind him that his Australian Indigenous subjects had suffered expropriation of their lands and denial of their legal status, and to ask for representation in parliament. Second, the first ‘national’ meeting of ‘Protectors’ declared ‘absorption’ as the goal of all governments that had control over Aboriginal people. The ensuing program of repealing all ‘protective’ abridgments of their civil and political rights took about 40 years of legislative reform to realise – assimilation in formal terms. While that was happening, the ‘Aboriginal population’ recovered and, in the late 1960s, became self-defining in Australia’s census. Since then, much land has been returned, and the debate about political representation has recently entered a new phase (‘the Voice’). If the avowed aim of protection was to ‘produce [in indigenous peoples] a fuller kind of colonial citizenship’ (p. 195) and ‘to make indigenous people yield to the status of British subjects’ (p. 196) then ‘protection’ has arguably succeeded (to the extent that when incidents of the partiality of justice demonstrate this project’s incompleteness contemporary Australians are much scandalised and shamed). The Torres Strait Islanders’ approach to the High Court of Australia in the 1980s and the effort put into seeking constitutional recognition since 2011 demonstrate that Indigenous Australians do find hope in the resources of the laws that the colonists imposed, just as the reformers of the 1830s hoped. Nettelbeck’s retrospect on the vicissitudes of ‘protection’ could be extended in time in order to grasp how Indigenous rights (as we in Australia now understand them) have arisen from colonial subjecthood.
Archival Returns: Central Australia and Beyond
edited by Linda Barwick, Jennifer Green and Petronella Vaarzon-Morel
xxviii + 345 pp., illustrated, University of Hawai‘i Press
with Sydney University Press, 2020,
ISBN: 9781743326725 (pbk), $45.00

Review by Mariko Smith
Australian Museum and University of Sydney

‘Place-based cultural learning – of ceremonies, songs, stories, language, kinship and ecology – binds Australian Indigenous societies together’, as described on this book’s back cover and the editors’ preface (p. xiii), neatly signposts the overarching focus of the 16 essays contained in Archival Returns: Central Australia and Beyond. Although the experience of having cultural learning recorded by outsiders, taken and archived away from Country is shared by many First Nations across the continent now called ‘Australia’, the attention of editors Linda Barwick, Jennifer Green and Petronella Vaarzon-Morel is firmly drawn to Central Australia – arguably the heart of ‘Aboriginal Australia’ in the minds of many a collector, researcher, curator and member of the public during the last two and a half centuries of European occupation. Aboriginal cultural collections and archives tend to feature strong representation from the region, reflecting historical collecting and researching trends that have been influential in defining what ‘Aboriginal’ means in Australia and invoking the ‘traditional’ versus ‘contemporary’ binary of authenticity around Aboriginality through comparisons of the early contact east coast with the seemingly more ‘untouched’ centre.

As outlined in their preface (p. xiv), the editors explained how the scope in Archival Returns initially focused on the Central Land Council (CLC) area (see Chapters 2–9) that covers almost 777,000 square kilometres in the southern half of the Northern Territory, as detailed on the CLC’s website.2 However, they subsequently expanded...

1 Also available in open access through the journal Language Documentation & Conservation.
beyond this specific region to the Daly River region (Chapter 10) to the north, still in the Northern Territory, then westward over the Western Australian state border to parts of the Western Desert (Chapters 11–15), and further extended down to the south-west of Western Australia into Noongar Country (Chapter 16). A handy map (p. xiv) shows the places and language groups featured in the book, with helpful cross-referencing of relevant chapters.

The ‘Beyond’ of the book’s title is evidently referring to these other regions in the Northern Territory and Western Australia that are geographically beyond Central Australia itself. As a Koori from the south-eastern coastal region, living in early contact, highly colonised and urbanised Sydney in New South Wales, who works at a museum that holds cultural material from First Nations across the country, I interpreted ‘Beyond’ across sociohistorical and cultural contexts as well. I keenly reviewed this book with a view to ascertain its appeal and value for those of us beyond the central, northern and western parts of this vast country who may be able to learn from the experiences and observations of the contributing authors – whether we work in GLAM (galleries, libraries, archives and museums) institutions located outside of Central Australia and surrounding regions with Arrernte, Western Aranda, Anmatyerr, Warlpiri, Warumungu, Kaytetye, Gurindji, Daly language region (including Matngele), Pintupi, NPY (Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara, and Yankunytjatjara) and Wirlomin Noongar communities, cultural collections and archival materials; or with other Aboriginal communities from elsewhere who are also trying to access, manage, maintain, reclaim and repatriate their own cultural heritage on their own terms and cultural protocols.

This volume involved 35 contributing authors, most of whom are non-Indigenous, with only eight identifying as Aboriginal. Reading through the contributors’ impressive biographies, there appears to be an abundance of non-Indigenous linguists, anthropologists, musicologists and researchers. I appreciate that each of the non-Indigenous editors and contributing authors has an admirable track record of working with and for Aboriginal communities, often over many years, with a number working directly for Indigenous organisations. However, it is still a reflection of a familiar trend of First Nations being researched predominantly by non-Indigenous experts (reminding me of Linda Tuhuiwai Smith’s observations, particularly in the introductory chapter to her seminal work Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples). As Nimi’ipuu (Nez Perce) American Indian scholar Dr Gretchen Stolte noted in her review of Indigenous Archives: The Making and Unmaking of Aboriginal Art in 2018, which also had a low number of First Nations authors compared to non-Indigenous ones, there is a ‘high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers engaging with archives, libraries,
museum collections and art centres across the country’, and I would emphasise that editors of publications involving Indigenous communities and subject matters should privilege First Nations writers as much as possible.4

The editors include a foreword written by Aboriginal man David Ross AM from the CLC and note in their preface that ‘[i]t is significant that several of the chapters in the volume are written by Indigenous people who are multiply engaged as both contributors to, and end users of, archives’ (p. xiii). However, this accounts for just over one-third of the total number of chapters – six out of 16 – featuring at least one Indigenous author. Stand-out chapters in positioning Indigenous authorities front-and-centre include Chapter 2, presented almost entirely in a flowing interview transcript style between co-authors Kungarakan and Arrernte man Shaun Penangke Angeles and Arrernte man Joel Perrurle Liddle, facilitated by non-Indigenous Research Fellow Jason Gibson. As a form of yarning-as-research, this chapter presents an alternative form of writing beyond the traditional academic article, with the capacity to gather information through a narrative/storytelling structure that also develops rapport and relationship-building between the participants.5 Other notable examples are Gurindji/Malngin/Mudburra artist and academic Brenda L. Croft’s first-person narrated contributions in Chapter 9; and Noongar academics and practitioners Clint Bracknell and Kim Scott’s providing their first-hand perspectives within the context of Noongar language revival on a useful community-driven model for groups working with endangered Indigenous languages.

Overall, Archival Returns holds great potential for inspiring First Nations communities, researchers and cultural institution practitioners in their own community-centred initiatives and research. It illustrates various ‘strategies and practices that enable the return and circulation of documentary records of cultural heritage (in textual, audio, visual, cartographical, digital forms) back to their communities of origin’, acknowledging and describing some of the inherent complexities (p. xiii). The first chapter contains the critical unpacking of the various technical, political, social and cultural processes and issues at play, as well as the relevant legal and ethical frameworks, for when communities, organisations, researchers and institutions negotiate physical and digital returns/repatriation. This volume helpfully offers, through case studies, a number of tools that older and younger generations in Aboriginal communities can employ to protect, manage and maintain place-based cultural learning in archival materials, in accordance with proper cultural protocols in the appropriate contexts. As stated by David Ross in his foreword, ‘Cultural knowledge is learned and earned and access to digital material should be done in the proper way’ (p. xi).

5 See Bessarab and Ng’Andu, ‘Yarning about Yarning’, 37–50.
References


Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology

edited by Jo-Ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan and Jason De Santolo

xii + 276pp., ZED Books, 2019,
ISBN: 9781786994608 (pbk), £18.99

Review by Mike Jones
The Australian National University

In the two decades since the first edition of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies there has been a flood of work exploring the decolonisation of history, education, pedagogy, universities, maps, landscapes, nature, literature, museums, health and healthcare, diets – the list goes on. Into this crowded market comes Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology, edited by Jo-ann Archibald Q’un Q’un Xiixem, Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan and Jason De Santolo, and introduced by Smith. This anthology draws on Archibald's concept of Indigenous Storywork, where researchers use seven key principles – respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness and synergy – to reconnect with Indigenous world views and knowledge systems. Unlike many of the other titles currently on offer, Decolonizing Research goes beyond decolonisation as intellectual construct or metaphor, aiming to produce 'holistic meaning-making ... using the heart (emotions), mind (intellect), body (physical actions), and spirit (spirituality), as well as recognizing the relationships of these realms to oneself, family, community, land/environment, and wider society' (p. 4).

Following Smith's Foreword and an introductory chapter from the editors, the book is divided into three parts, focusing on Indigenous Storywork in Canada (Part I), Aotearoa New Zealand (Part II) and Australia (Part III). Each part contains a brief introduction, followed by chapters exploring specific projects and areas of research that draw on the Storywork concept and principles. Here the reader finds a diverse

1 Archibald, Indigenous Storywork, 2.
group of Indigenous researchers and activists exploring an impressively eclectic range of topics, including research ethics, film aesthetics, community-based maths education, gender studies, Māori law, literary theory, song renewal, and more. Another strength is the conspicuous inclusion of the work of postgraduate and early-career Indigenous researchers, highlighting how the shifts in perspective represented by this type of work are as much generational as conceptual.

Of the 14 main chapters, some stand out. From Canada, Sara Florence Davidson provides clear, practical and accessible descriptions of how the seven Storywork principles guided her doctoral research and enriched her relationships with participants and communities; and Georgina Martin’s co-authored chapter with Elder Jean William is a valuable exploration of the ways in which story functions as Indigenous theory. From Aotearoa New Zealand, Hayley Marama Cavino looks at decolonising gender and the ‘active, negotiated, relational, and political process’ (p. 102) of interpretation; and Lee-Morgan’s chapter ‘Pūrākau from the Inside-Out’ is a fascinating exploration of the methodological shift required to conduct research starting from ‘the heart’ or te pū o te rākau (the core of the tree) rather than following the Western convention of working from the outside-in. From Australia, Larissa Behrendt argues for the power of storytelling as an ‘act of sovereignty’ (p. 175), reasserting ownership of the land; and Evelyn Araluen Corr suggests that literary theory should be situated ‘as a tool of broader storywork practice, as opposed to storywork being a subset or specific methodology of literary theory’ (p. 197). The latter is a worthwhile reminder that Indigenous methodologies like Storywork may not sit comfortably within existing disciplinary structures, and may instead require researchers to step outside the ‘brick wall’ (p. 203) of established academic practice.

The structure of the book draws attention to geographical distinctions. It is therefore unfortunate that the introductory sections to each of the three parts from Archibald, Lee-Morgan and De Santolo are so brief, and are comprised mostly of chapter summaries. Some additional analysis drawing out the continuities and differences between the three regions would be useful, particularly given the theme of interrelatedness that recurs throughout many of the chapters. But there is plenty here to interest those working in a range of disciplines, including history. The challenge for non-Indigenous researchers in particular is to avoid the temptation to see powerful, expansive and complex Indigenous narrative traditions as an opportunity to mine data, or as untested knowledge that needs to be ‘selected, framed, elevated, and legitimated’ through existing colonial research methods (p. 152). Instead, as Lee-Morgan highlights, we need to think more deeply about our own position, our relationships to our research and our participants, and the
particular contexts, landscapes and communities in which different knowledge systems are embedded. *Decolonizing Research* makes a valuable contribution to this ongoing process.

**Reference**

Pathfinders: A History of Aboriginal Trackers in NSW

by Michael Bennett

xii + 322 pp., illustrated, NewSouth Publishing, 2020,
ISBN: 9781742236568 (pbk), $34.99

Review by Meg Foster
Newnham College, University of Cambridge

Pursuing criminals across rugged country, hunting cattle duffers, scouring the bush for missing persons; each of these vignettes are well known to an Australian audience, as encounters with the bush are embedded in the nation’s culture, history and folklore. While much has changed since the colonial period, when Europeans’ assumed mastery over the land was used to justify their possession of it, there remains a sense that men and women who knew the country and could make the bush an ally were Australian pioneers, and should be celebrated as national heroes. Although palatable to a settler Australian audience, this narrative contains a colonial legacy that remains to be overturned: in national consciousness, these ‘pathfinding’ legends are white.

Michael Bennett’s book, Pathfinders: A History of Aboriginal Trackers in NSW, undercuts this mythology by showcasing the Aboriginal men and women who traced people, goods and livestock the length and breadth of New South Wales. This is the first history to place Aboriginal trackers centre stage, as protagonists not only in criminal histories of the colonial period but also as active agents in their own lives. Each chapter focuses on the biography of a particular tracker, while also moving forward in time, from the mid-1800s well into the twentieth century. With forensic attention to detail, Bennett charts each tracker’s career with the police, including maps of the areas they traversed in search of their quarry. While these maps bring the immense swathes of country Aboriginal trackers navigated into stark relief, the book is also replete with detail about their cases. Readers gain a keen sense of the factors working against each tracker: the delays before each hunt could commence, the misinformation, the evidence eroded by the elements.
The skill involved in tracking is illustrated beyond a doubt in this book, making for a significant intervention in the field of colonial history. Most colonial Australians believed Aboriginal people’s tracking skills to be inherent traits; useful, but seldom worthy of praise. Due to trackers’ habitual position on the outskirts of colonial histories, this narrative has never been so directly challenged as it is in *Pathfinders*. Bennett pieces together how Aboriginal knowledge of country, law and custom equipped trackers with the skill set to thrive in circumstances that often confounded their European counterparts.

Indeed, it is the embeddedness of each tracker in Aboriginal community and culture that allowed them to succeed, and the strength of this ongoing connection is one of the defining features of the book. Although trackers worked for settler Australians, they did not serve them alone. Aboriginal and European law existed simultaneously, presenting an intricate web of responsibilities and competing loyalties that trackers were forced to navigate. Aboriginal trackers’ relationship to kin and country could affect the nature of a search; a tracker might ‘lose the trail’, for example, if asked to pursue their own people.

The book’s ability to piece together Aboriginal biographies and illustrate the endurance of Aboriginal law and culture is exceptional. When the historical archive is a colonial one, saturated in settlers’ beliefs about Aboriginal inferiority and often actively working to erase Aboriginal subjecthood, the extent of detail in *Pathfinders* is truly remarkable.

However, the significance of this intervention is obscured by the book’s dearth of context. Although *Pathfinders*’ introduction and conclusion bookend the piece with the settler colonial context, it is not woven through the narrative. The legacy of frontier violence, the realities of dispossession and the increasing control of institutions (such as the Aboriginal Protection Board) over Aboriginal people’s lives are hardly referenced. The book reads as a chronicle of Aboriginal trackers’ lives and family histories. It is largely up to the reader to connect these stories to colonial history more broadly.

This may have been a deliberate choice on Bennett’s part. By focusing so closely on individual lives, the book pushes back against historical narratives that cast Aboriginal people as passive victims of colonisation. Each chapter highlights a tracker’s agency and their talent. Bennett originally conducted his research into Aboriginal trackers through investigating native title claims, and this also appears to have heavily influenced *Pathfinders*. Like native title claims, the book emphasises connection over disconnection; continuity in Aboriginal culture and tradition over the impact of colonisation and change.
Without sufficient attention to context, however, the reader has little sense of how remarkable this connection truly was. Despite dispossession and genocide, most of the Aboriginal trackers featured in this book were able to maintain their relationship with culture and country, as well as navigate and adapt to the settler world. European prejudice and structural inequality were not only features of these trackers’ lives, they also illustrate how exceptional, resilient and strong these figures were to be able to carve a space for themselves and their families.

*Pathfinders* is an important book. It brings to the fore the lives of Aboriginal trackers who had previously been relegated to the sidelines of history, and illustrates how instrumental they were in the success of the colonial police force. However, the book has the potential to do so much more than fill this absence, and readers familiar with settler colonial history will see the deeper significance in this work. Aboriginal trackers were remarkable for their talent and their skill, but also for their relationships, their navigation of Aboriginal and settler colonial worlds, and their modes of survival.
Mary Montgomerie Bennett (1881–1961) was the daughter of Robert Christison, a successful pastoralist who established Lammermoor Station near Hughenden, in north Queensland, in the late nineteenth century. Bennett spent her formative years moving between London, New South Wales, Tasmania and Lammermoor: it was her time at Lammermoor that sparked her later interest in what had been positioned as the ‘Aboriginal problem’; she dedicated herself to advocating for Aboriginal people following her move to Western Australia in 1930. Author of works including Christison of Lammermoor (1927) and The Australian Aboriginal as Human Being (1930), Bennett was a prolific writer, educator, humanitarian and human rights activist, and has garnered a significant amount of historical interest. Sue Taffe’s A White Hot Flame is the latest monograph to explore her story.

Acknowledging works relating to Bennett by historians including Fiona Paisley, Marilyn Lake and Alison Holland, Taffe locates her intervention in the contextualisation of Bennett’s early life, moving away from a sociocultural analysis towards a narrative biography focusing on her family’s influence. This approach was perhaps employed to address an identified gap in historiography – ‘historians have researched her achievements in public life … but curiously Mary’s childhood and early adulthood have been of no interest to them’ (p. xv) – and to locate the emergence of what is described as Bennett’s ‘conflicted identity’ as someone who sought to expose injustice while exonerating her own family’s complicity in frontier
violence. For Taffe, Bennett was ahead of her time, an intellectual and moral standout. Heroicised for her dedication to and ‘palpable love’ (p. iix) of Aboriginal people in Australia, it is this picture of Bennett that Taffe paints.

Unlike Holland’s 2015 *Just Relations: The Story of Mary Bennett’s Crusade for Aboriginal Rights*, which employs a human rights lens to analyse Bennett’s work, the current volume offers no critical framing – Taffe’s goal is to provide a biographical grounding for Bennett. This she achieves. The chapters move chronologically through Bennett’s life, describing her parents, childhood, adolescence and adulthood, and her emergence as an author and activist, criss-crossing London, outback Queensland, regional New South Wales, Tasmania and regional Western Australia.

Unfortunately, this approach has resulted in a narrative that – while informative and thick with opportunity – reads as a celebratory account of Bennett’s life. Bennett’s story offers multiple avenues to engage with the complex history of race relations, the entanglements of intimacy and violence that framed much of the frontier experience, the implications of assimilationist policies, and the emergence of human rights discourse in Australia. Moreover, her work has ongoing implications relating to knowledge production, repatriation and personal history, particularly for Aboriginal people whose families intersected with Bennett’s life. Yet such avenues remain unexplored.

Taffe draws on a rich archive of primary sources – Bennett was a prolific writer, and the text is heavy with descriptions of her archival record. While this utilisation of primary material is a strength, there is minimal engagement with relevant historiography, including works written about Bennett herself, leading to a narrative that lacks crucial context and leaves historically significant questions unexplored.

Perhaps the starkest example here is the descriptions of Jane Gordon, a young child of Aboriginal and European ancestry who was taken by the Christisons from Queensland to London in 1898–99. Painted by Taffe as a ‘pretty and adaptable little girl’ (p. 62), Bennett’s mother arranged for her return to Australia just two years after their arrival in London. This, with Taffe’s comparison of Christison’s sending of Aboriginal men from Lammermoor to England in 1881 for education, lacks critical interrogation relating to their removal or experience; while the final chapter informs readers of Jane’s fate – she was sent to Fraser Island before being removed to Yarrabah – this is presented without attending to its ongoing implications, and it ultimately centres Bennett: ‘How Mary … would have rejoiced to know that Jane’s great grandson … teaches Aboriginal students at James Cook University’ (p. 408).

The discussion of Jane not only reflects a lack of historical consideration but also points to the more difficult aspect of the book – the Aboriginal people Bennett lived with and advocated for inadvertently become backdrops to her story. While this may be expected considering the book’s aims, combined with a lack of contextualisation,
it leads to some no doubt unintended yet problematic assessments. The Aboriginal people on Lammermoor, discussed initially in relation to how they fitted Bennett’s family projections as she sought to position her father’s station as a safe haven for Aboriginal people on the frontier, become supporting characters to Taffe’s positioning of Bennett: Wyma and Barney are spoken of with fondness, yet Taffe fails to consider their experience or agency, nor critically considers Bennett’s own characterisation of them. Rather they become one side of a false dichotomy that pitted Aboriginal people employed on stations such as Lammermoor against a life of ‘alcohol and opium abuse [by] the fringe-dwelling, displaced Aboriginal people of north-western Queensland’ (p. 62).

Moreover, an attempt to position Aboriginal people as central to Bennett’s life has unfortunately led to the diminishing of their experiences. For example, at one point, the class, gender and familial expectations of Bennett are conflated with the dislocation of Aboriginal people from family, culture and Country: ‘Jane had no choice as to where her future home might be, nor did her mother or the other family members she had left behind. [Bennett’s] future was as an art student in London … she also would have had little choice in the matter’ (p. 57).

Bennett’s work spanned the 1920s to the 1960s, and Taffe has touched on many issues of historical and contemporary significance. For example, Taffe points to Bennett’s advocacy regarding governmental requisition of Aboriginal peoples’ wages, with a description of Bennett’s correspondence on the matter: no further interrogation is provided, nor an extrapolation to contemporary cases relating to stolen wages. This is an unfortunate oversight given Bennett’s positioning as a forward thinker on matters of racial injustice.

A point highlighted by Taffe was Bennett’s characterisation of her father that coloured her assessment of his life, leading her to overlook potentially complicated issues. Yet, perhaps unconsciously, Taffe’s portrait of Bennett becomes similarly framed. The narrative is at times repetitive, slipping between past and present tense, which, combined with an emotive tone and unreferenced sections, means it often becomes speculative and somewhat romantic. While this may seem flippant, it speaks broadly to the platforming of white people by using colonised people as a backdrop.

Overall, Taffe has shown that Bennett’s life was a fascinating one, her story is rich with opportunity to analyse the histories of race relations and humanitarianism in Australia. For those interested in Bennett, A White Hot Flame will be invaluable for its thorough descriptions of Bennett’s archival material and biographical information relating to her and her family.
On Red Earth Walking: The Pilbara Aboriginal Strike, Western Australia 1946–49
by Anne Scrimgeour

Review by Padraic Gibson
Jumbunna Institute, University of Technology Sydney

On Red Earth Walking is an extraordinary, definitive account of the historic strike of Aboriginal pastoral workers in the Pilbara region of Western Australia from 1946 to 1949. The book is anchored in extensive oral history interviews, conducted with veterans of the strike by author Anne Scrimgeour in the early 1990s. The perspectives of these marrngu (local Aboriginal people in the Nyangumarta language) are woven through a blow-by-blow account of developments in the strike campaign, and the response of pastoralists and state agencies, drawn from an extremely broad body of research.

The three-year strike was a profound act of self-emancipation. It broke a regime of control that bonded Aboriginal workers and their families to particular stations. While the Department of Native Affairs had the formal power to negotiate written agreements governing pay and conditions, these were not used before the strike on Pilbara stations, where pastoralists had full control. Many workers weren’t paid any cash at all.

Police terror held this system in place. Frontier massacres were a living memory for many marrngu. Police enjoyed extraordinary powers under the state Native Administration Act 1936 to ensure confinement on the stations. They also routinely used summary violence beyond these powers. Chains, beatings and dawn raids to intimidate workers secured the regime of hyper-exploitation.
All this changed when the marrngu began to strike. Their position as an essential labour force for the capitalist economy of the Pilbara meant that, ‘the action taken … to gain greater autonomy and dignity in their lives involved withholding their labour in a prolonged strike’ (p. 1). This led to a dynamic fusion of resistance to colonial control, drawing on assertive pride in the practice of marrngu culture, with labour movement tactics that hit the profits of pastoralists.

The strike was conditioned by ‘the network of social and family relationships and practices developed in the maintenance of continuing religious and cultural life’ (p. 92) and it also became a constituent feature of these relationships. Preparation for the strike, and strategy meetings about its future, took place during seasonal and ceremonial gatherings. Strike camps were situated close to significant sites. The contempt for Aboriginal people and culture held by pastoralists and their supporters led to a fatal underestimation of the marrngu. As pastoralist Edith Miller is quoted as saying, ‘we had always said that they could never be conscripted or get together in a crowd … we were wrong’ (p. 92).

Scrimgeour’s account of the first moment of collective defiance of police by strikers is one of a number of very moving stories. In July 1946, following a major race meeting in Port Hedland, strikers established a camp within the town and refused to move. Passive resistance tactics stopped police attempts to arrest strike leaders. This stand required deep courage and was a decisive turning point: ‘Marrngu discovered that the power exercised over them by the police and officers of the Native Affairs Department was not absolute’ (p. 176).

The impact that strike action had on the pastoral economy meant that marrngu threats to spread the strike at various points forced a whole series of concessions in the nature of colonial rule. The theft of Aboriginal children, which had been a deep source of grievance for marrngu and continued apace across most of Western Australia, was stopped in the Pilbara when the strike began. Pulling more workers off stations was used as a threat by marrngu to protect their strike camps from eviction, or protect strike leaders from arrest.

Important for marrngu success was solidarity from the trade union movement. Crucial here was the white, communist activist Don McLeod. A central demand of the strike was for official recognition of McLeod as a representative of the marrngu. While pastoralists cast marrngu as dupes of McLeod, Scrimgeour demonstrates that this demand was fundamentally about Aboriginal people’s right to form their own organisations and make collective decisions. McLeod travelled to Perth to promote the campaign and was a key informant for the Communist Party of Australia and other left-wing activists who made up the Committee for Defence of Native Rights that championed the cause of the strikers.
The labour of both Black and white workers, and cooperation between them, was necessary to keep the wheels of the pastoral economy turning in the Pilbara. This created a basis for multiracial working-class action along the supply chain, which at key moments challenged the cross-class ‘settler solidarity’ relied on by pastoralists to maintain their hegemony. An attempt to bar Aboriginal station workers from riding trains was undermined by railway workers. Wharf labourers at Port Hedland resolved to strike to demand that marrngu, excluded by racist regulations from employment on the wharf, could take up jobs. This stance was overturned by Australian Workers’ Union officials, acting in concert with the employers and the Department of Native Affairs. However, a resolution to ban the transportation of wool from Port Hedland by the Seaman’s Union, called after the police made a series of mass arrests of strikers, could not be broken. This was decisive in forcing negotiations that ended the strike in 1949.

The book explores many questions raised by the strike movement with rigour and sensitivity including gender oppression, caste, personality conflicts, the paternalistic relationship of pastoralists to marrngu, contradictions between strike mythology and history, and much more. Sadly, Anne Scrimgeour died of leukaemia in January 2020, one month before the publication of this book. As Aboriginal people today face continuing, discriminatory labour regimes such as the Community Development Program and ongoing police violence, this story of emancipation through mass defiance, and the power of strike action and union solidarity, stands as an inspiration for continuing struggle.
**Taking Liberty: Indigenous Rights and Settler Self-Government in Colonial Australia, 1830–1890**

by Ann Curthoys and Jessie Mitchell

446 pp., Cambridge University Press, 2018, ISBN: 9781107084858 (hbk), £75.00

Review by Paula Jane Byrne

Visiting Scholar, State Library of New South Wales

This is a streamlined, engaging history of the constructing of self-government and its entanglements with Indigenous policy in Australia. An immensely detailed book, it is written primarily from secondary sources and as such follows the grain of what we have come to know as ‘settler’ historiography. This emerged in the late 1990s at a time when Indigenous histories and theoretical approaches seem to have faded from the consciousness of non-Aboriginal historians. As such this book follows the predominant tendency in settler historiography to prioritise the settler state and its discourses, portraying Aboriginal people as both caught in them and reacting to them.

The book does not situate itself in this settler historiography but in a far earlier division between the optimistic history of self-government and an entirely separate history of dispossession and destruction of Indigenous peoples. In this sense the book seems aimed at a popular audience. I am not sure if this derives from authors, agent or publisher but it does introduce complex questions about where and who we are as historians. History writing creates the past and if driven by ideas of popular demand and public interest it is in chains.

The book argues that the colonies making up Australia were not uniform in their approach to Indigenous policy. This is because there was great confusion as to who was responsible for Indigenous people, England or the colonies themselves, and what form this responsibility should take. England was the site of Imperial conscience and seems to have slipped out of its duty through pretend discussion leading nowhere, a plea of inadequate funding and a fear of the expense of military
engagement. Time after time the book shows enlightened individuals whose projects disintegrated or were ignored in favour of an inchoate status quo – one that the book’s conclusion suggests still remains.

While Aboriginal people may have considered themselves subjects and citizens, particularly in relation to the Crown, they were not viewed as such by any colonial government. The authors claim that Aboriginal people learned of the Crown through missionaries and hence developed the idea of the Crown as central and important. They write of successive delegations to Royal visitors. In this point the analysis seems simplistic. Looking to Indigenous writers we discover literate Aboriginal people also read the newspapers and sometimes wrote to them,\(^1\) and the struggle between the invasive squatting interest and the Crown filled the press of the 1840s. It was the settler state that denied citizen and subject status to Indigenous people, this was not necessarily the perspective of Aboriginal people themselves.

The book shows the vibrancy of debate in the anti-transportation movement in New South Wales and Tasmania, and that this time of fanfare and joy of elections gave little attention to Indigenous people except for the creation of the resilient myth that servants were the most genocidal of the colonists. England began to fear the impact of self-government on Indigenous people. The book gives a thorough history of self-government in each colony and follows small references to Aboriginal people with determination. The ad hoc and haphazard nature of moves to self-government is expertly captured and we discover the reason for the absence of Aboriginal people from Australian history. The rhetoric did not include them, the archive directed research, and so the state recreated itself in its history. Expediency determined Imperial Indigenous policy, not rights. Such expediency allowed a kind of whispered transferral of responsibility for Aboriginal people. To capture all of this in one book is a great achievement and this makes it a very important addition to Australian history.

When we follow the tracks of current settler historiography we naturally have greater detail for some places and not others. The book is microscopic in some places, not in others. The archive determines what kind of history has been written. So much colonial ethnography in Victoria has shaped the discourse about Victorian Aboriginal people and, I would venture, shaped Aboriginal politics. The ethnographic interest was not so influential in the historical writing of New South Wales or Western Australia where we non-Aboriginal Australian historians only became aware of different Noongar groups around Perth very recently. At times in this book we dig deep, at times our nails scratch the surface. Libby Connors, with Black Brisbane influence, recognised the Aboriginal polity in Brisbane and in Taking Liberty it stays there around Brisbane when in reality it stretches across Australia.

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\(^1\) Bond, ‘Dali’pie the Statesman’, 87–112.
If Aboriginal people around Brisbane had their own political concerns and non-Aboriginal readings and perspectives were not central to them in this most violent region, the same must hold for Aboriginal people across Australia.

There’s the rub. Māori writers have criticised settler historiography as making them wallpaper to the grand narratives of the conquerors. In concentrating on settler views and settler politics don’t we simply strengthen that narrative? This book does consider and address Aboriginal agency and it does give a marvellous streamlined history of the whole continent, but this is a notion of Aboriginal agency that is secondary to the constructing of that streamlined account. Here, Aboriginal people react and respond to English and colonial initiatives. If the book had begun with the Aboriginal polity, hinted at, described since Phillip and, admittedly, politically fraught for those who seek to describe it today, the history it makes would be vastly different. Disentangling the influences as to why this particular book appears now is a worthwhile project.

Reference

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