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Preface

This volume marks a new phase in the editorship of Aboriginal History. In early 2010 the Aboriginal History Inc board appointed us as the new editors. This year we have had the pleasure of working with the outgoing editor, Peter Read, in putting this volume together. We have also benefitted from the tireless efforts of both the book reviews editor, Luise Hercus, and the production editor, Tikka Wilson, as well as the advice and guidance of the Aboriginal History Inc board and the copyediting expertise of Geoff Hunt.

Volume 34 reflects Aboriginal History’s continuing commitment of exploring diverse aspects of Indigenous Australian history in original ways. Many of the contributors have uncovered new histories and sources, while others have re-interpreted more familiar sources in fresh and innovative ways. All of the articles offer new insights into the Aboriginal past and present.

In the first essay, ‘Why didn’t you listen: white noise and black history’, Mitchell Rolls reconsiders the question of silence in Aboriginal history by examining a wide range of literature on Indigenous themes which was produced during the period dubbed by WEH Stanner as the ‘Great Australian Silence’. In their contributions, Felicity Jensz and Ann McGrath both explore histories of Aboriginal marriage but in very different ways. Jensz uncovers the significance of matrimony in Moravian missionaries’ attempts to Christianise Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century, while McGrath traces the history and continuing legacy of relationships between Aboriginal and Irish people in Australia.

The next two articles examine historical figures who had a major impact on Aboriginal experience and attitudes towards Indigenous people. Meg Parsons’ study is focused on Sir Raphael Cilento, an often overlooked figure who oversaw Queensland’s Aboriginal leprosy management strategies in the 1930s and the establishment of the Fantome Island leprosarium. Pamela McGrath and David Brooks examine William Grayden’s 1957 film Their Darkest Hour, and how it was interpreted by contemporary audiences, Indigenous activists, and finally, the Ngaanyatjarra people’s perceptions of the film now.

Martin Thomas then explores similar themes in his article on the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land. Highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of this expedition which amassed a vast collection of natural history specimens and Aboriginal artefacts, Thomas also sheds light on the Indigenous response to it and its continuing legacy.

In ‘Aboriginal Enterprises: negotiating an urban Aboriginality’, Sylvia Kleinert discusses the little known history of Bill Onus’s Aboriginal Enterprises, a tourist outlet which fostered an influential Indigenous art scene in Melbourne. Her overarching theme is its impact on Aboriginal identity formation in south-eastern Australia. Jessie Mitchell also examines questions of Aboriginal cultural performance, although a century earlier, in her study of the Aboriginal reception
of Prince Alfred’s 1868 royal tour. Finally, Petter Naessan gives a rich linguistic history of the name Coober Pedy, evaluating a range of sources each claiming different Indigenous etymological origins of the name.

Although volume 34 is a very diverse collection, the articles all share an interest in exploring cross-cultural interactions and negotiations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, through both intimate and public relations as well as through knowledge production, be it cultural or political. The articles admirably demonstrate how these key themes can be explored through the historical archive, whilst also revealing the sheer diversity of the archive which includes material culture, still and moving images, language sources and performances. Some of these articles also illustrate the rich research produced through working collaboratively with Indigenous communities in order to reinterpret and historicise archival images or objects, or meticulously track changes in language use. Meanwhile other authors have emphasised Indigenous performativity. They have teased out the delicate and complex negotiations Aboriginal people have engaged in, either willingly or under duress, in order to satisfy demands from audiences for expressions of culture and identity, while also using those opportunities for self-expression.

As the new editors of *Aboriginal History* we look forward to maintaining the journal’s strong tradition of engaging with Indigenous Australian history in an interdisciplinary way, drawing the disciplines of history, archaeology, linguistics, and so on into conversation with each other. Our goal is also to carry on the journal’s role in showcasing innovative scholarship and fostering new debates on the Indigenous past and its impact on the present. Finally, we hope that our scholarly conversation about Indigenous history will become more international, and look forward to future volumes including comparative studies which consider Indigenous history in Australia and overseas.

Shino Konishi and Maria Nugent
Why didn’t you listen: white noise and black history

Mitchell Rolls

In 1999 Henry Reynolds published Why Weren’t We Told, his bestselling personal reflection elaborating his awakening encounter with a manifestation of Australian race relations. According to Reynolds, the encounter furthered his growing sensitivity to the fact that Australian history, or at least that which he was taught and which characterised much mid-twentieth-century historiography, omitted elucidating the history of racial conflict, let alone its extent. In fact not only narratives detailing conflict, but Aborigines themselves were mostly absent from the mid-twentieth-century national story, at least insofar as according them any agency. In his introduction Reynolds explains the book’s title question was one that he had been asked over and over: ‘Why were we never told? Why didn’t we know?’

‘Why weren’t we told’ is a peculiar question to ask. It is peculiar for a number of reasons: its exculpatory sentiment, the implied refusal to accept responsibility for ignorance, its facile rendering of complex matters, and its inaccuracy amongst much else. Nevertheless, it is perhaps for these reasons that the book has sold so well. Writing in the preface to the 2000 edition Reynolds notes that in response to its first print run ‘[l]etters arrived from all over the country [Australia]. One theme that came through in them again and again was that the title Why Weren’t We Told summed up exactly what my correspondents themselves were feeling.’ Reynolds went on to say that many felt betrayed by the history they were taught in schools, and that much of the nature of settler-Aboriginal conflict had been suppressed. He positions his book as contributing to a new movement of national significance, one that:

desire[s] to face up to our history, to embrace the past in all its aspects, to cease trying to hide the violence, the dispossession, the deprivation. People now want to know the truth about the past and to come to terms with it.

If, however, the question ‘why weren’t we told’ is more obfuscatory than revelatory about the extent of knowledge vis-à-vis the nature of Aboriginal-settler conflict then it is clear that the reputed desire ‘to face up to our history’ comes with some constraints. The phrase ‘People now want to know’ (my emphasis) is

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1 Reynolds 2000: 1.
2 Reynolds 2000: xii.
3 Reynolds 2000: xiii.
revealing, for it begs the question of why they did not want to know previously. It suggests that an appetite for the histories that many are now consuming is a recently acquired taste. This means that other questions we could and should ask might better address the ‘step … towards national maturity’ that Reynolds’ correspondents seek.\(^4\) ‘Why didn’t you listen’ is one such question.

Reynolds mentions that in north Queensland at least many were aware of the fraught relations between settler and Aboriginal people. Beyond urban ignorance and, I will argue, confected naivety, regional and remote populations often lived in propinquity to even larger populations of Aborigines and/or Torres Strait Islanders, particularly in northern Australia. In Townsville, where this was the case, Reynolds found ‘the traditions, behaviour and attitudes of the frontier era persisted and where race relations were a major cause of friction, a constant topic of discussion and debate.’\(^5\) He goes on to say that ‘There had perhaps never been a time in North Queensland’s hundred years of white history when the “Aboriginal question” had not been a matter of contention among the settlers and their Australian-born descendants.’ If as Reynolds contends the 1960s–1970s settler population of Townsville were still steeped in the attitudes and debates of the frontier, then here was a significant regional population that by this very description did not need to be told about their history. They imbibed it through dint of their association with the raw and rude energies of a lingering frontier. Not there the silences awaiting the voice of history, but the noise of ‘discussion and debate’.

In his 1968 ABC Boyer Lectures, anthropologist WEH Stanner titled his second address ‘The Great Australian Silence’. Whilst these lectures are widely regarded as groundbreaking, the particularities of his discussion are more often overlooked than addressed. Perhaps the title of his second lecture, which conjures a more encompassing quieting than what he actually describes, bears some responsibility for this. In brief, and excluding specialist literature – that ‘large array of technical papers and books expressly concerned with the aborigines’ – Stanner surveyed ‘a mixed lot of histories and commentaries dealing with Australian affairs in a more general way.’\(^6\) Even though that ‘mixed lot’ was surprisingly few,\(^7\) it is nevertheless generally representative. These texts, Stanner explained, ‘seemed … the sort of books that probably expressed well enough, and may even have helped to form, the outlook of socially conscious people between’ 1939 and 1955.\(^8\) Absent from these arguably informative texts, informative at least for those who were ‘socially conscious’, is any interest in explicating Aboriginal-settler relations. This was a situation in urgent need of redress.

So it was a particular sort of literature, principally generalist Australian historiography published in the decades of the mid twentieth century, which

\(^4\) See Reynolds 2000: xiii.
\(^5\) Reynolds 2000: 29.
\(^8\) Stanner 1991: 22.
Stanner was remarking on. As noted by a number of scholars, nineteenth-century historians were far less constrained than their mid-twentieth-century counterparts. Their works were inclusive of the Aboriginal presence and the resultant conflict of interests, often detailing its violent and bloody course.\(^9\) For several this course was not a dispassionate recording, nor mitigated through triumphalism, but cause for censure.\(^10\) And these historians had an abundance of evidentiary material. Reynolds explains that when he and Noel Loos commenced researching Queensland’s settlement history they unearthed ‘abundant, various and incontrovertible’ evidence of frontier violence from ‘official government records, the newspapers, the travellers’ tales, the reminiscences.’\(^11\) In respect to such evidence Queensland is unexceptional.

Nevertheless, after describing briefly the literature he had surveyed, Stanner proceeded with what has become his most widely known and cited paragraph. Besides the title of the second lecture, this paragraph must also bear some responsibility for the widespread belief that very little interest in, let alone concern, was expressed for Aborigines in any literature throughout this period and beyond, not just the general histories that Stanner had in focus.

I need not extend the list. A partial survey is enough to let me make the point that inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned under habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. We have been able for so long to disremember the aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so.\(^12\)

Reynolds cites from this paragraph.\(^13\) Stanner’s observations strengthened his growing ‘disquiet’ with ‘mainstream historical writing’\(^14\) and recollections of ‘general histories’\(^15\) he had encountered in schooling. The frank and abundant recounting of violence and atrocities that Reynolds was finding in nineteenth-century sources were omitted from later texts: ‘Textbooks had been bowdlerised to exclude the less attractive aspects of the process of land settlement.’\(^16\) So it is that Reynolds too is able to ask of himself ‘how was it that I didn’t know’ of this bloody history and to furnish a ready answer.\(^17\)

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\(^11\) Reynolds 2000: 102; see also 92, 118–119, 119–120.
\(^12\) Stanner 1991: 24–25.
\(^14\) Reynolds 2000: 91, 104.
\(^15\) Reynolds 2000: 88.
\(^16\) Reynolds 2000: 114.
Without disagreeing with Stanner’s general point insofar as the specific body of literature he discusses, it is important to note that even within that field there are exceptional texts. Although a journalist and not a trained historian, Clive Turnbull’s *Black War: The Extermination of the Tasmanian Aborigines* (1948) is notable. Yet the notion that this period (1930s to mid 1950s) and well beyond was devoid of meaningful mention of Aborigines persists. A ‘typical white Australian upbringing’ is frequently cited as sufficient explanation for one’s segregation from the brute realities of settlement and its enduring legacy.

Growing up in ignorance of the nature of Aboriginal-settler relations was a contrivance of external factors that insulated against disclosure. As Ann Curthoys says of Stanner’s memorable passage:

> Yet it is precisely because the metaphor is so striking that the too-simple narrative … has taken hold. Too often it is taken to imply a kind of historiographical periodisation where there was no Aboriginal history before Stanner’s own lecture and an end to the silence after it. Neither half of this statement is quite true: there is neither complete silence before 1968, nor was it completely ended afterwards. … Some historians, both inside and outside the academy, did take Aboriginal history seriously before 1968, and the ‘cult of forgetfulness’ of which Stanner spoke had some life in it afterwards.

Moreover, if attention is cast beyond the body of literature that Stanner surveyed his metaphor loses much sense of its general applicability. With a singular but important exception – that being the absence of Aboriginal voices in the telling of their histories – it becomes apparent that what he noticed was obscured from view through one particular ‘window’ was clearly visible through others. The significance of this cannot be understated. Whilst not discounting the importance of silences in twentieth-century historiography, those arguing ignorance of the general reality of Aboriginal history on the basis of an apparent silence are revealing very specific and limited reading practices. So abundant and varied is the material explicating settler-Aboriginal relations and its often violent course it is difficult to comprehend proclamations of naivety.

Remembering that Stanner excluded from his survey that ‘large array of technical papers and books expressly concerned with the aborigines’, it is apposite to note that for anyone with an interest in Aboriginal matters there was indeed a ‘large array’ of available material. The anthropologist AP Elkin’s *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them*, was first published in 1938.

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19 Curthoys 2008: 247. (As noted Stanner was referring to the period between 1939 and 1955, ‘by which time some objections of a serious kind were beginning to be made to the idea of assimilation.’ Stanner 1991: 22. The fact that many take the date – 1968 – of Stanner’s lecture as the reference point, rather than the period he was actually referring to, is further evidence of how the specificity of his argument is overlooked.
20 See Attwood 2009: 9, 262–263.
A second edition was published in 1943. This was reprinted in 1945 and 1948, with a third edition published in 1954. This is within the period of Stanner’s concern (1939–55). Clearly Elkin was being read. Whilst the first edition omits frank acknowledgement of frontier atrocities, by the third edition Elkin discusses the processes of ‘pacification by force’, where ‘organised punitive expeditions’ sought ‘to teach the natives a lesson – often by shooting indiscriminately’. These practices, Elkin states, continued into the 1930s.

Elkin also published a raft of more esoteric material between 1939 and 1955, including *Aboriginal Men of High Degree*, first published in 1945.

‘Put aside’ also by Stanner, on account that these texts were ‘expressly concerned with the aborigines’, was Paul Hasluck’s *Black Australians*, first published in 1942, and Edmund Foxcroft’s *Australian Native Policy: Its History Especially in Victoria* (1941). On this basis if a similar survey of general history for a ‘socially conscious’ readership was to be undertaken today, amongst those of many others one would need to exclude all but one or two of Reynolds’ texts. Nevertheless, *Black Australians* is not so specialist so as to be alienating for the non-specialist reader. Hasluck explained his study was:

primarily an attempt to find out the attitude of white settlers to black aborigines in the early phases of contact between the two races in Western Australia and how that attitude may have affected the history of contact. Secondly, it is an attempt to find out whether that attitude was changed after the two races met and how it was changed.

From today’s perspective these aims appear unsurprising, and not outside the ambit of a plethora of recent histories that attract the general reader. In *Australia’s Native Policy*, Foxcroft, a political scientist at the University of Melbourne, provides a sober assessment of relevant policy that is none the less critical of its failings, and his concern for Indigenous welfare genuine.

Although published in 1930 and thus outside the period of Stanner’s purview, activist Mary Bennett’s *The Australian Aboriginal as a Human Being* (1930) is also notable. Arguing that Aborigines should be administered federally and not by the states, Bennett proclaims ‘There is a growing number of enlightened humane Australians who feel that the present position of the Aboriginals is unworthy of a great nation.’ Concerning land she was a passionate advocate of the need for its return.

On land ownership rests the title to hunt for a living. On land ownership is based the peace of the tribes. On land ownership is constructed the

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22 By 1974 there had been four Australian editions and seven reprints.
25 Foxcroft agreed with Stanner’s observation that ‘Australian native policy is a curious mixture of high intention and laudable objectives; almost unbelievably mean finance; an incredibly bad local administration, and an obstinate concentration on lines of policy which 150 years of experience have made suspect.’ Cited in Foxcroft 1941: 155.
26 Bennett 1930: 10.
social organisation with its geometrical design of marriage laws and inheritance, with its obligations and privileges. On land ownership is founded the right to perform ceremonies for increasing the supply of animals and plants. Parted from their land the race dies as surely as an uprooted tree.

In concluding Bennett argues there ‘is no excuse for our criminal indifference to the condition of the Aboriginals’. Bennett’s nemesis, AO Neville, the former chief protector of Aborigines then commissioner for native affairs, published *Australia’s Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community*, in 1947. From today’s perspective some of Neville’s arguments are flawed, often patronising and sometimes offensive. He does, however, acknowledge Aborigines ‘as the real owners of the land, its first possessors’ and he is critical of how governments and individuals have responded to the Indigenous presence: ‘We are all newcomers to them, dispossession, despoilers.’

Amongst other Aboriginal-themed works the anthropologist, medico and explorer Herbert Basedow published *Knights of the Boomerang* in 1935. Expressing his concerns over Aboriginal affairs he warned that if ‘Abuse, vice, pestilence and slavery [continue to be] tolerated in broad daylight’ then ‘we’ will be committing ‘racial homicide.’ The anthropologist Charles Mountford published *The Art of Albert Namatjira* in 1944, which by 1953 was up to its seventh imprint; *Brown Men and Red Sand: Journeyings in Wild Australia* in 1948; and *Life and Legends of the Aborigines* in 1951. A history inclusive of ‘the life and times’ of prominent Aborigines such as Albert Namatjira is one of the books Stanner was hoping to see written. Ronald and Catherine Berndt’s much reprinted *The First Australians* appeared in 1952, their *Arnhem Land, Its History and Its People*, in 1954. This listing of publications with content accessible to interested general readers, not specialists alone, is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. It is a list readily expanded several times over. It is, however, sufficient to demonstrate that through broadening the sort of books considered by Stanner, the period described by him as ‘The ‘Great Australian Silence’ could easily be described as filled with noise.

Although now the subject of considerable criticism, Daisy Bates’ *The Passing of the Aborigines*, first appearing in November 1938, was immediately popular. It was reprinted in December of that year, and by 1948 a further four times. Whilst Bates’ account of her ‘lifetime spent among the Natives’ and of Aboriginal life is considerably embellished, and her depiction of Aborigines frequently offensive, the success of her book demonstrates significant public interest in Aborigines, not their slipping from consciousness. The public thirst suggests that the ground for historians was fertile if they had been

27 Bennett 1930: 15, see also 128–142.  
28 Bennett 1930: 142.  
29 Neville 1947: 23, see 22–23.  
more inclusive of Aboriginal-colonial-settler relations in their writing of the national story. Whilst it is easy to fault Bates’ text on many grounds, it is not so easy to make equivalent her depiction of Aborigines and perceptions held by settler-Australians. Yet Adam Shoemaker reads the text’s popularity as being indicative of settler attitudes, and of having significant influence in further shaping settler understanding of Aborigines.33 That there was congruity on some levels between Bates’ descriptions and broader sentiment does not in and of itself prove consonance between reader and text. It is unnecessary to discount the possibility of pernicious influence to admit that readers are capable of bringing unexpected responses to any literature. Apposite here, however, is the high level of demonstrable interest in Aborigines throughout the period that Stanner memorably termed ‘The Great Australian Silence’.

Both more literary and middlebrow fiction and non-fiction was inclusive of Aboriginal themes throughout the period of Stanner’s concern too. An awareness of Aboriginal dispossession and frontier bloodshed is acknowledged in some of this work. Bob Croll’s *Wide Horizons: Wanderings in Central Australia* appeared in 1937 and was reprinted the same year. Much of this text had already been published in various newspapers and magazines following Croll’s first visit to Alice Springs on the train in 1929. His interest in Aborigines is evident throughout, and this interest is the subject of the final five chapters. The concluding chapter acknowledges the bloodshed and loss of life that helped facilitate dispossession, and reminds readers that ‘we owe these people for the whole of a continent’.34 He describes as ‘shocking’ ‘our treatment of the original owners of the land we now possess’.35 Eleanor Dark’s novel *The Timeless Land* (1943) is a sympathetic portrait of Aboriginal life and people in the Sydney region between 1770 and 1792. Republished throughout the 1940s and beyond, and still in print, the novel was well researched. It was accurately described by Healy as ‘a romantic, historical work disciplined by fact, livened by curiosity, and dignified by intention’.36 Amongst many other works that could be listed which are inclusive of Aborigines and related themes are Ernestine Hill’s *The Territory* (1951); the former administrator of the Northern Territory, Charles Abbott’s *Australia’s Frontier Province* (1950); and although published earlier, Jesse Hammond’s *Winjan’s People: The Story of the South-West Australian Aborigines* (1933). Hill and Hammond do not refrain from accounts of atrocities and reprisal killings. Hammond reprimands that ‘[f]ar from calling the blacks savages, we should admit that they had more right to call the whites savages.’37

A number of children’s books addressing Aboriginal themes were also published throughout this period. Many evoke a sense of traditional life, often combined with descriptive accounts of varied labour on pastoral stations.

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33 Shoemaker 1989: 50.
34 Croll 1937: 158.
35 Croll 1937: 147.
36 Healy 1989: 175.
37 Hammond 1933: 67.
Amongst these is Mary and Elizabeth Durack’s *All-about: The Story of a Black Community on Argyle Station, Kimberley*. First published by the *Bulletin* in 1935, by 1944 it was up to its sixth impression. Rex Ingamells’ *Aranda Boy: an Aboriginal Story* (1952) is also in the genre of children’s books. Although often fanciful for the authors had in mind a young contemporary readership, striven for (and perhaps achieved) it is descriptive if shallow verisimilitude. For even younger readers the Durack’s published *Way of the Whirlwind* in 1941 (reprinted in 1946, a second edition in 1956, and a third in 1979), and the illustrated *Piccaninnies*, also in the 1940s, for very young readers.

Adding to the crescendo disturbing Stanner’s period of silence were Mary Durack’s *Keep Him My Country* (1955), and a series of Ion Idriess novels, including *Over the Range* (1937), *Nemarluk: King of the Wilds* (1941), *Outlaws of the Leopolds* (1952), *The Red Chief* (1953), and *The Vanished People* (1955). Although his *Lasseter’s Last Ride* was first published in 1931, it was up to its 27th edition by 1942, making it relevant to the period of Stanner’s concern. *Drums of Mer* (1933) was similarly reprinted a number of times throughout this period and beyond. Of a more literary suasion, Xavier Herbert’s *Capricornia* (1938), which won the Sesquicentenary Prize, dealt explicitly with issues that many refused to acknowledge, including dispossession and Aboriginal-settler sexual relations. Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *Coonardoo* (1929), canvassing interracial intimacy, was also readily available. Judith Wright published poetry collections – *The Moving Image: Poems* (1946, reprinted 1953), *The Two Fires* (1955) – that included poems explicating the disquiet, guilt and sensitivities confronting settlers as they attempted to grasp the complexities of their love of the land and Aboriginal dispossession.

Already it should be evident Aborigines had not been forgotten, that many were not congregationalists in Stanner’s ‘cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale’,38 and that there was considerable appetite for books from a range of different perspectives, styles and literary type that dealt with Aboriginal themes. Some of the readily accessible literature did not explicate dispossession, frontier violence or enduring disadvantage. Nevertheless, in its inclusion of Aborigines and related subject matter, whether historically or contemporaneously, imaginative or more factually descriptive, it assisted in perpetuating awareness of an Aboriginal presence. But much of the literature published or available in this period did discuss dispossession, frontier violence and contemporary disadvantage. It is for these reasons that Attwood and Foster note that:

All this history-making suggests that ‘the great Australian silence’ pertained as much to the act of listening as to that of speaking, which prompts one to speculate whether the questions recently posed by many Australians in the context of reconciliation – ‘Why didn’t we

38 Stanner 1991: 25.
know?’ and ‘Why were we never told?’ – should not include ‘Why didn’t we ask?’; ‘Why didn’t we listen?’ and ‘Why weren’t we able to hear.’”

The fact that interest in Aborigines and their affairs reached across the arts in general further emphasises the pertinence of the above questions. Two prominent quests for a nationalist aesthetic during this period sought inspiration from Aborigines. Whilst Margaret Preston was not in any way concerned with Aboriginal affairs or welfare (in fact she was dismissive of such interests), she did at least bring to popular attention the richness of Aboriginal visual arts. The Jindyworobaks too, in their clumsy desire to free Australian verse from alien influence and make it resonant with a sense of inimitable Australianness, turned to Aboriginal languages, motifs, symbols and imagined ways of perceiving the landscape. Both Preston and the Jindyworobaks helped promote consciousness of an Aboriginal presence to different national constituencies. Preston not only appropriated Aboriginal motifs, symbols and palette for use on an assortment of home furnishings in her quest to found a distinctive Australian aesthetic, she also assisted in organising the first exhibitions of Aboriginal art. The inaugural exhibition was held in 1929 at the National Museum of Victoria. Two later exhibitions were held in Sydney at David Jones, a major department store. Preston was an advisor for the first of these (1941), with the second in 1949 featuring art collected from Arnhem Land by the anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt. With the latter exhibition attracting many viewers, Ronald Berndt thought it ‘provided the turning point in the Australian public’s attitudes towards Aboriginal art.’ Another exhibition, *Primitive Art* was held in Melbourne in 1943, and a series of Aboriginal art exhibitions were held during the 1950s. The Arrernte watercolourist Albert Namatjira was painting throughout this period too, having first exhibited in Melbourne in 1938. The critical reception of these exhibitions is beyond the specific interests of this paper. Their significance lies in the fact that there was sufficient interest in Aboriginal art to sustain successive exhibitions throughout the period of supposed silence and forgetfulness.

The performing arts were another medium through which knowledge of Aborigines was disseminated. They widened further the cultural productions dealing with and trying to make sense of the Aboriginal presence, and through which to understand the past. Not all of this work dealt with the brutality of dispossession and its enduring legacy, but it performed a significant role nevertheless in continuing to expose Aboriginal themes to different audiences. The premiere of John Antill’s ballet, *Corroboree*, was performed by the National Theatre Ballet Company in Sydney in July 1950. Rex Reid choreographed this first production, which courtesy of the Arts Council of Australia Commonwealth

40 See Rolls 2006.
41 See Ingamells 1938; Elliott 1979.
43 Jones 1989: 175.
Jubilee Celebrations toured Melbourne, Sydney, Launceston, Hobart, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Broken Hill. For the leading journalist and travel writer Colin Simpson this original production was little short of dreadful.

“[I]n terms of choreography and costume design [it] was no more than a gaudy, circus-like travesty of corroboree. Through lack of understanding and plain lack of knowledge, the choreographer completely missed the spirit of the real thing, in a riot of baseless representationalism, full of incongruous and extraneous elements.”

These comments suggest familiarity with Aboriginal cultural forms, a familiarity unexpected if ‘The Great Australian Silence’ was as effective as popularly understood. The later Dean and Carell production was performed for Queen Elizabeth II at the Tivoli Theatre, Sydney, in February 1954. Beth Dean, the American born ballerina and choreographer, and her husband Victor Carell, a singer and film director, conducted extensive research for this production which included months living with remote Aborigines. Their book based on this experience – *Dust for the Dancers* – was published in 1955. Dean and Carell provide a romantic description of traditional Aboriginal life and of remote life in general. Despite withholding criticism of the impact of settler conquest, they nevertheless do raise the brute fact of dispossession, albeit as a passing comment.

As the European civilization rudely pushes more deeply into the tribal hunting grounds, the dark people are inevitably forced more and more urgently to come into permanent camps or reservations, where for lack of jobs under present frontier type conditions, they must rely on a benevolent government for supply.

Then more dramatically and indicating awareness of the nature and rapidity of change they add, ‘It is an eradicable pincers movement, that is cutting the people off from their roots as surely as scissors used on a flower bud.’

Other artists did raise explicitly the plight of Aborigines in their work, particularly individual ‘social realist’ painters associated with Melbourne’s Contemporary Art Society. Social issues were a concern for Yosl Bergner, a Jew who arrived in Australia in 1937 as a 17 year old. Significantly Bergner did not have to steep himself in Australian general history in order to find compassion for Aborigines, whom he identified with Jews, nor understand the foundation of their disadvantage. Not for Bergner the question ‘why wasn’t I told’ for the telling was everywhere to be witnessed.
For Bergner the evidence of dispossession and alienation was everywhere – in the sight of an Aboriginal ‘busker’ on a city pavement playing a popular American song on a gum leaf, as much as in Carlton tenements. In Tocumwal Bergner discovered two Aboriginal families camped on each side of the town, to which they were forbidden entry.49

Observations such as these, which found expression in Bergner’s paintings, were there to be made by all settlers. The last painting of Bergner’s with an Aboriginal subject is Aborigines in Chains, 1946. The catalyst for this image was a 1946 Herald article.50 Those with an interest in art had the opportunity to see several of Bergner’s Aboriginal works in a Myer Art Gallery exhibition in July 1947. Four of 14 paintings and four of ten drawings of Bergner’s, were of Aborigines.51 Noel Counihan was another of the artists associated with the Contemporary Art Society who expressed concern for the plight of Aborigines in his paintings. As with Bergner, Counihan drew inspiration from situations observable by all, in this instance an Aboriginal camp near Swan Hill, Victoria.52

In 1954 he also organised a letter to be sent to Paul Hasluck, the Minister for Territories, in protest over the controversial imprisonment of the respected Aboriginal watercolourist Albert Namatjira, whose plight attracted extensive media coverage.53

This raises another crucial factor. A prominent feature overlooked in the exculpatory ‘Why weren’t we told’ is contemporary media coverage of Indigenous activism and of issues concerning Aboriginal welfare. The period through the 1930s to the 1950s saw increasing Aboriginal organisation and advocacy. Aborigines were pressing their demands for land, for better conditions on reserves, and less discriminatory unemployment relief, amongst other concerns. These objectives were widely reported in the media, and many settlers assisted in the cause.54 The best known protest early in this period is the symbolic 1938 Day of Mourning, an initiative of William Cooper and others to found a platform from which to vent political demands at the sesquicentenary Australia Day celebrations.55 The protest received wide press coverage. Typical was the Melbourne Argus which cited Jack Patten, one of the Aborigines’ Progressive Association leaders:

We, as aborigines, have no reason to rejoice on Australia’s 150th birthday ... This land belonged to our forefathers 150 years ago, but to-day we are being pushed farther into the background.56

51 See Warren 1947.
53 Smith 1993: 325.
Patten was interviewed on radio beforehand where he explained ‘we have no reason to rejoice. You have taken our land away from us, polluted us with disease, employed us at starvation wages, and treated many of our women dishonourably … The only reward you offer [Aborigines] is extermination.’\(^{57}\)

Two prominent Aboriginal organisations were founded in this period (1930s through to the 1950s). The above mentioned Aborigines Progressive Association was founded in 1937 and the Australian Aborigines’ League in 1935.\(^{58}\) Newspapers and radio reported their activities, concerns and demands. Bill Ferguson of the Aborigines Progressive Association published a lengthy article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 15 October 1957. Titled ‘Give Us Justice!’ Ferguson wrote in part:

You can read in your history books some of the terrible things [white men] have done to us. I have heard of them from the old men.

Old Mungo told me once of the Murdering Island massacre, from which he was the only one to escape … He told me how a squatter near Narrandera and his men drove a whole camp of blacks on to an island in the middle of the river and shot them down, women and children too, until everyone was dead.\(^{59}\)

The article includes mention of another massacre effected through a poisoned waterhole. In a 1941 broadcast on 2GB Sydney and 2WL Wollongong Pearl Gibbs reported ‘My people have had 153 years of the white man’s and white woman’s cruelty and injustice and unchristian treatment imposed upon us. My race is fast vanishing.’\(^{60}\) In the preface to their *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights* Attwood and Markus comment that their ‘first attempt’ at short-listing ‘documents for the collection yielded more than 600, mostly dated from the 1930s.’\(^{61}\) A short-list of greater than 600 shows how extensive the material on Aboriginal political activism is. Whilst much of this material is in the form of petitions, addresses to meetings, letters, notes and the like, a good deal also appeared in contemporary newspapers, magazines, journals and radio broadcasts.

Federal parliament was another arena where concern for Aboriginal welfare was given public venting, and not only on the floor of the house. Some of the then Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck’s speeches to parliament and to conferences, were published in 1953 in a booklet entitled *Native Welfare in Australia*. In his 18 October 1951 report to parliament on the Native Welfare Conference held in April of that year (which recommended a formal policy of assimilation be implemented), Hasluck complains about ‘a good deal of misrepresentation, both inside Australia and overseas, on the subject of

\(^{57}\) Cited in Attwood and Markus 1999: 80–81.
\(^{58}\) See Attwood and Markus 1999: 58–64.
\(^{59}\) Cited in Attwood and Markus 1999: 78.
\(^{60}\) Cited in Attwood and Markus 1999: 95.
\(^{61}\) Attwood and Markus 1999: xx.
Australian treatment of native peoples’, Hasluck’s complaint is further evidence that for anyone with an interest in Aboriginal affairs there was no shortage of readily available information. It was just as possible during the era of Stanner’s ‘Great Australian Silence’ as it is today to mount an evidence-based critique of Aboriginal policy and affairs.

Coverage of Aboriginal themes which included accounts of frontier violence was a staple of the popular monthly magazine *Walkabout* (1934–1972). It was published throughout the period of Stanner’s ‘Great Australian Silence’, including during the war years. Most issues were inclusive of Aborigines in some way: through photo spreads, more typically of traditional Aborigines such as Baldwin Spencer’s photographs of the ‘Arunta’; and incidental mention and pictures in disparate articles on a wide assortment of topics. Also regularly included were more specialist essays written for a general audience. Amongst topics covered were: Aboriginal art; black trackers; the Torres Strait Islands and Groote Eylandt; missions; Aboriginal bird and place names; Aboriginal weapons and tools; the skills and division of labour of fishing, hunting and gathering; and sea craft. Occasionally lengthy and detailed essays on a particular subject appeared, such as Donald Thomson’s 17 page ‘The Story of Arnhem Land’. More romantically inspired essays along the lines of ‘a day in the life of…’ also featured, including contributions in this vein by Ernestine Hill.

Scrutarius regularly contributed thoughtful and occasionally acerbic book reviews to *Walkabout*, of which a number were concerned with Aborigines. Whilst clearly not a fan of the prolific Ion Idriess, with the review of *The Red Chief* commencing ‘Notching up another facile effort’ and concluding ‘Anyhow, it’s good, red-blooded, primitive adventure stuff’, Scrutarius nevertheless discerned a broadening interest in Aborigines and sensitivity towards their mistreatment in a growing number of publications. The review of Alice Duncan-Kemp’s *Where Strange Paths Go Down* (1952) begins:

> Nowadays, with every published variation of the aboriginal theme, one senses the national conscience tweaking at Australian history. Undoubtedly, we did treat the aboriginal badly, brutally even ... And, if to the aboriginal we are still not over-kind when and where nobody is looking, our face grows a little more red about him as the civilizing

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62 Hasluck 1953: 15.
63 Hasluck 1953: 15–16.
64 Thomson 1946. For Arunta (sic) photographs see Spencer 1950. On Aboriginal art see Cotton 1940; Unknown 1944; Meredith and Longhin 1951; Luckman 1951; McCulloch 1952; Morris 1954. On black trackers see Marshall 1943; Hood 1939. On Torres Strait Islands and Groote Eylandt see Patterson 1939a; Church 1945; Barrett 1946; Spencer 1953; Rose 1944. On missions see Mansbridge 1939; Embury 1939; Barclay1939; Harris 1944; Gore 1951; Tuckfield 1952a, b. On Aboriginal bird and place names see Thomson 1950; Fenner 1955. On weapons and tools see Pern 1941; Fenner 1954. On fishing, hunting and gathering see Patterson 1939c, 1940; Williamson 1945. On sea craft see Patterson 1939b; Harney 1951. For a-day-in-the-life-of, see Hill 1940; Williamson 1943.
65 Scrutarius 1954: 46.
years pass, and we pour out a spate of books, as a sort of amende, to show that he was a jolly good blackfellow after all; and so say all of us.  

Here is clear evidence that, at least for this reviewer, by the early 1950s there was sufficient material being published for it to constitute a body of literature demonstrating sensitivities critical of Australian history. Not for this reviewer ‘Why wasn’t I told’, but the suggestion that too many authors were leaning too far towards apologia in their telling of settler-Aboriginal relations. Despite this, Scrutarius did not refrain from acknowledging frontier bloodshed. The review of Roland Robinson’s Legend and Dreaming (1952) is explicit.

The more books we have of this kind, the more we shall begin to understand the original Australians whom rough, unlettered and insensitive invaders dispossessed of ‘country’, deprived of rights and customs, mustered like cattle and shot down in attempted escape. In such initial blots on the white man’s copy book much of what Mr Robinson call the aboriginal’s epic mythology became obliterated. But much remains…

Whilst it is easy to fault Walkabout’s representation of Aborigines, particularly through the prism of contemporary literary criticism, more sanguine readings are not only possible but sensible. To take but one example, for every essay that reports Aborigines or their cultures as dying out, and by this is meant the then so-called full-blood Aborigines and their way of life, there is a contrary story. In an article indicatively titled ‘The vanishing Australian’ Mary Durack opines that Aboriginal racial and cultural assimilation into the dominant settler community is inevitable. In contradiction to this ostensibly popular mid-twentieth-century understanding of the future of Aborigines, Leone Bittris reports that ‘even today [1951] the natives are thriving … their numbers are increasing each year’. In a relatively lengthy essay in May 1954, John Wilson describes Aboriginal cultural revival in Australia’s north-west.

While politicians haggle from the party platforms in the south, debating the future of the native race, the tribal natives are initiating a cultural revival, infiltrating the more westernized groups and the old native law is being revived with startling and significant success.

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66 Scrutarius 1953b: 43. Alice Duncan-Kemp’s childhood was spent on Mooraberrie, her family’s 360 square mile cattle station in Queensland’s south-west corner. Where Strange Paths Go Down is an elaboration of station life between 1908 and 1918. There is extensive description of Aboriginal life and related themes.

67 Scrutarius 1953a: 39.

68 Durack 1945.

69 Bittris 1951: 44.

70 Wilson 1954: 15.
In 1953 *Walkabout* was printing 32,000 copies per month, with circulation increasing.\(^{71}\) Aggregate circulation since the inaugural issue in November 1934 was over 5,400,000 copies.\(^{72}\) It was self funding, and its profits helped support other activities of its publisher, the Australian National Publicity Association.\(^{73}\) *Walkabout* was being read. Its readers could not have avoided confronting an Aboriginal presence, knowing the contemporary difficulties faced by Aborigines and their impoverished condition, the often violent and bloody path to dispossession, realising that Aborigines considered themselves to be owners of the land usurped by settlers, that the long period of hostilities arose not from barbarity but from Aborigines expressing their legitimate interests, and being aware of the current disputations – official and otherwise – concerning ‘what to do’ by way of address. It was not for the readers of *Walkabout* a period of great silence on these issues. And this is the crux. Beyond that particular literature surveyed by Stanner, in the more specialist books and reports, and the more demotic narratives of history, travel, life-stories and experiences, and in the pages of magazines like *Walkabout* and in the art of the social realists like Bergner and Counihan and the poetry of Wright, all that obscured from view through the one window was on open display.

Yet for all this there were silences and silences that matter. Not only in general historiography as identified by Stanner, but the plethora of other material and information available had little impact across all levels of formal education. This endured well beyond 1955, the end of the period of Stanner’s concern. In the introduction to her recent book *Black Politics: Inside the Complexity of Aboriginal Political Culture*, Sarah Maddison recalls ‘a typical white Australian upbringing. I lived in a white, middle-class suburb and had white, middle-class friends.’ She recalls ‘grainy black and white films of semi-naked Aboriginal people hunting and gathering in the desert as the entirety of my education about the way Aboriginal people lived before Captain Cook “discovered” Australia.’ When in her twenties Maddison realised the impact of colonialism on Aborigines she became ‘distressed by my own ignorance’.\(^{74}\) Notwithstanding the widely acknowledged failings of educational syllabi on these issues, this is another ‘why wasn’t I told’ explanation. Asking that question is excusatory: the apparatuses, contrivances and institutions of state bear the burden of responsibility. Someone or something else is responsible for our ignorance, for which we are ashamed but not blameworthy. As elaborated above, so

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\(^{73}\) The Australian National Travel Association changed its name to the Australian National Publicity Association on 16 December 1940. It reverted to its former name in 1955. Australian National Publicity Association 1941, *Minutes of Board Meeting No. 32*, Sydney on 25th November 1940, Sydney: 3, MM550/05, Beresford Box 4 (43), Mitchell Library.

\(^{74}\) Maddison 2009: xxxvii.
abundant is the material crowding the period of ‘The Great Australian Silence’ and beyond, and so varied its nature, form and methods of transmission, that considerable information about the contemporary circumstances of Aborigines and the nature of dispossession was part of the demotic experience of living. The issue is not the lack of telling, it is the mechanisms that rendered functional a turning away from the evidence, the will to ignorance. Stanner spoke of Australians averting their gaze, and of the ‘cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale’. One cannot avert one’s gaze nor practise forgetfulness if one is not cognisant of what one is witnessing. Whilst it would be easy to apportion blame, to lay the above evidence before those attributing their ignorance to an agentic failing and issue the charge of complicity, the politics of blame is rarely if ever elucidatory. Hence the need for other questions: what is it that makes one avert one’s gaze? Is the aversion conscious or unconscious? How does one reconcile experience – an awareness of Aboriginal deprivation and dispossession – with a systemic refusal to seek or trace the causal trajectory? How is it that a nation practises a cult of forgetting? Is it a fundamental human flaw, an evolutionary adaptation that manifests in this way; an exigent response peculiar to particular conditions? The usual explanation that a ferment of guilt, shame, racism and settler triumphalism is responsible is inadequate for amnesias of this sort, the blind-eye to evidence, are not peculiar to settler societies, nor absent from indigenous societies.

The range of literature, creative work and media coverage from which the noise disturbing Stanner’s ‘silence’ emanates is extensive. Work contributing to the noise is representative of the popular, learned and specialist; and high-, middle- and low-brow culture. The opportunity to be well informed existed in all categories, though as noted outside of political activism Aboriginal voices were mostly - though not entirely - absent. That this work was produced, published and broadcast, and through the number of imprints obviously read, suggests a thirst for Aboriginal themes and knowledge of Aborigines, and sensitivity to the awkwardness of the postcolonial environment. In light of this work the ubiquitous cries of ‘Why weren’t we told’ intimate a more recent and self-interested exculpatory turn, for to admit exposure to any of the range of work discussed above is to admit awareness of the conflict between indigene and settler, and the legacy of dispossession. More straightforward it is, and far less confronting, to locate our confected ignorance in the source identified for us by Stanner, than to investigate the mechanisms and provocations that facilitate personal professions of naivety over that which is demonstrably remembered, witnessed and known. Recollections of the silences in one’s schooling stand-in for the entirety of one’s education, learning and experiences. As an explanation for ignorance this is at best partial. Newspaper coverage, radio broadcasts and art exhibitions (both Aboriginal and otherwise), are all deserving of more consideration for the role they played in revealing a now taken-for-granted hidden Aboriginal history. Historians and other scholars could remind themselves of the maxim that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and that beyond the boundaries of the general histories under Stanner’s purview, including low- and middle-brow cultural productions, there is a more
forthcoming Aboriginal history, notwithstanding its flaws. Much work needs to be done to better grasp the period of Stanner’s ‘Great Australian Silence’, for such a notion is more readily repudiated than substantiated.

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Controlling marriages: Friedrich Hagenauer and the betrothal of Indigenous Western Australian women in colonial Victoria

Felicity Jensz

Throughout the colonial world, sex, sexuality and intimacy were topics of intense scrutiny.¹ In colonial spaces sexual control was, according to Ann Laura Stoler, a method in which colonial authorities could regulate not only the lives of the Europeans within colonial spaces, but also the lives of Indigenous peoples.² Missionaries were also very concerned with the sexuality and sexual practices of the people amongst whom they worked, and often saw the female sexuality of indigenous peoples as being in need of controlling and according to Christian norms. Missionaries had long expected their converts to conform to Christian moral codes relating to sex and sexuality. The historian Gorden Sayre has asserted in the context of seventeenth century northern America that ‘missionaries took the well-defined Christian separation between the chaste and the unchaste and used it as an analogy for the distinction between the converted and unconverted around their mission.’³ Such sentiments seeped into the nineteenth century in all corners of the globe. Chastity was seen as a sign of a docile and regenerate people, and conversely, promiscuous behaviour was a sign of rebellion and a lack of respect for authority and Christian norms. Natasha Erlank has argued that missionaries in the 1840s in Xhosaland, South Africa lacked methods of enforcing upon the converts their preferred sexual codes and therefore used ‘the control of spiritual resources to punish converts.’⁴ Such control included refusal of baptism, excommunication, and suspension from positions of moral authority. This paper argues that not only exclusion from but also inclusion within Christian practices served as forms of punishment for Indigenous people seen to be at odds with the moral practices and sexual codes expected on a mission station. In particular, this paper contends that the arranged marriages of Indigenous females on Moravian mission stations in the Colony of Victoria in the mid-nineteenth century was undertaken by the missionary in charge in order to control the sexuality of these women.

These women – Rhoda Toby, Nora White, Emily Peters and Ada Flower – had been sent some 3,500 kilometres from the west coast of Australia to the other side

¹ Ballantyne and Burton 2009: 4.
² Stoler 1989: 635.
⁴ Erlank 2003: 76.
of the continent with the hope that they would be good role models for Gunai/Kurnai women on the Ramahyuck mission station in Gippsland in the east of the Colony of Victoria. They were, however, quickly married off in an attempt to control and subdue them, primarily because their behaviour conflicted with the strict moral code of the missionary, Friedrich Hagenauer. Hagenauer himself was one of the most important missionaries in colonial Victoria, as well as being a member of the colonial government’s Board for the Protection of the Aborigines. In order to contextualise the marriages of these women, this paper will examine what marriage specifically meant for Moravian missionaries, before it progresses to examine the marriage prospects of the first three male converts of the Victorian Moravian mission stations, and then finally the paper will examine the marriages of these women in light of the religious, gendered and racial expectations placed upon them.

Moravians and the institution of marriage

The Moravian Church was reformed in the eighteenth century on the estate of Count von Zinzendorf, who himself had a strong pietistic upbringing. His influence ensured that the Moravian Church had strong links to the pietistic tradition of eighteenth century Germany as well as to the evangelical awakening of eighteenth century Britain. Marriage was practised within the Church as a sacred institution incarnating the glory of God. As within broader eighteenth and nineteenth century European practices, marriage signified a monogamous relationship between a male and a female, which privileged the nuclear family over larger social groupings. Particularly within the Moravian Church one of the functions of marriage was to allow Church members to become more unified with God through marital sex, which was seen as an act of glorifying God.

The Church maintained a strict control over gender relationships throughout the eighteenth century and it was at the discretion of the Church Elders that marriages were arranged. These arranged marriages were considered by the Elders, who took their decision to the Lord in the form of a lot, which was usually comprised of drawing one of three tokens either imprinted with a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’, or a third, blank token. According to the nineteenth century Moravian historian John Holmes, the Church Elders did not invest authority in ‘any man’ rather applied ‘for direction to the Lord himself, by the use of the lot.’ Thus, the practice of drawing a lot to endorse marriage was deemed to be an extension of the Lord’s decisions, however, it was also a source of discontent for some members. During the nineteenth century this practice was discontinued for common members, yet the lot continued to be used to arrange marriages for missionaries until the end of the nineteenth century.

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7 Peucker 2006: 30–64.
9 Holmes 1818: 286.
10 Mettele 2009: 130.
Since the beginning of the Church, missionary workers – both single and married – had been sent out in order to bring the Christian word to the ‘heathen’. By the 1870s there were over 300 missionaries in the field, amongst whom were often single men, who were only allowed to marry within the Church. As the men had often spent many years away from Europe, they often were not aware of potential mates and could not offer the Church administrators the names of prospective spouses. The Church Elders, with the help of the lot, thus facilitated such marriages. Once the decision of lot was in favour of a particular potential bride for a missionary, the Elders invited the sister to accept the offer of marriage. She was, however, free to reject the offer if she did not deem it suitable for her, giving women agency in their own destinies. Moravian women were seen as missionaries in their own right, as well as being seen as wives, mothers, role models, and also confidants for indigenous women on mission stations. The historian Amy Schutt has argued that, within the context of eighteenth century Moravian Indian missions in America: ‘gender identification helped bridge cultural differences and gave Indian and Euro-American women entrée into each other’s worlds.’ By the nineteenth century, however, Moravian missionary practices had become more patriarchal, as Moravians mirrored the contemporary gender politics of other Protestant missionary organisations. The roles of female missionaries were consequently diminished, with the result that their work was deemed inferior to that of male missionaries. Nonetheless, women of both Western and Indigenous heritages were necessary and important members of a mission station, as their roles on the mission reflected broader societal structures.

Friedrich Hagenauer, along with his colleague Friedrich Wilhelm Spieseke, had been sent out in 1859 to Australia as unmarried men to establish the Ebenezer mission station in the north-west of the Colony of Victoria in the hope of converting the Wotjobaluk to Christianity. Within the Moravian framework, the Australian Aborigines were seen as being in particular need of the Christian message as they were deemed ‘poor, despised creatures, who are on the lowest level’ of both cultural and religious scales. Through introducing the values, norms, and practices inherent in both Christianity and Western European civilisation, it was expected that missionaries would ‘raise’ Aborigines to the level of Europeans. In the early and uncertain stages of this mission field, the Church administration had deemed the cost of sending out and supporting married couples to be prohibitive. However, sending out only single male missionaries ensured that the focus of the missionaries’ endeavour was placed on proselytising the Indigenous men. The administration cautioned against lone male missionaries conversing with female ‘heathens’, and it was expected that

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11 See for example Jensz 2010: 132-133.
12 Schutt 2004: 87-103.
14 23 February 1841, #5, Protocoll der Unitätsaeltesten Conferenz [hereafter PUAC], Unitätsarchiv, Herrnhut, Germany [hereafter UA].
15 1 June 1853, #8, Protocoll des Missionsdepartements [hereafter PMD], UA; 15 June 1853, #11, PMD, UA; 15 November 1854, #12, PMD, UA; 29 May 1852, #6, PUAC, UA.
if a male missionary was to converse with ‘heathen’ females, it ‘must always be done in the presence of his wife.’ According to the nineteenth-century British Moravian, Mrs EH Hassé:

One lesson which [the Moravians] soon learnt was, that, not only is it not good for a man to be alone, but that this is especially so in the polluted moral atmosphere of heathendom, and further, that man’s work is best done when according to the Divine ordinance, it is with women as his helpmeet.

Within the Australian mission field this lesson was demonstrated aptly through the experiences of Job Francis, a 22-year-old unmarried missionary. Francis arrived at Ebenezer in November 1861, to help run the day school. He soon complained bitterly to the headquarters of the Church in Germany about the ‘adulterous eyes’ of the Indigenous women in the camps, adding that he could not work with them. He maintained that most of them had ‘had connections with white men’, and thus were ‘repulsive to my nature.’ If only he were sent a wife, he declared, he would be able to overcome this ‘hindrance’. Francis’s description of Indigenous women, and his subsequent request for a wife of his own, reflected the binary positioning of women in his world-view as either sexually immoral women or wives. It also reflected a belief more generally held amongst both Moravian men such as Francis, and Moravian women such as Hassé, that ‘heathendom’ was associated with lax morality, and that such undesired traits of a race could be conquered if the ‘heathens’ – especially the females as the perceived bastions of European family values – were to adapt and subscribe to new religious understandings which reflected a Western world-view and control of sexuality through marriage. Indigenous women were therefore more likely – in the male missionaries’ imagination and descriptions – to occupy the role of the immoral, licentious woman than that of wife of a missionary. This was especially so in the nineteenth century as missionaries were only allowed to marry Moravian Sisters known by the Church administration. Francis’s confessed inability to work amongst Indigenous women as a single man speaks of his awareness of his own sexuality, and the threat that he believed Indigenous women posed towards it.

The Moravian Church did not send out a wife for the 22-year-old Francis and he subsequently left the Church after marrying a non-Moravian without permission from the Church Elders. Some years before, during the early days

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16 Spangenberg 1840: 50. This booklet was addressed to both male and female missionaries collectively, with no specific directions to female missionaries.
17 Hassé 1897: 4.
18 25 January 1862, #14, PUAC, UA.
19 Francis to Reichel, 10 December 1861, Moravian Microfilm Collection (MF) 177, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria.
20 24 July 1862, #15, PUAC, UA.
21 In eighteenth-century North America there were examples of Moravian missionaries marrying indigenous converts, however, this trend does not seem to be followed in the nineteenth century. See Wheeler 2006: 90.
22 Jensz 2010: 145–146.
of the Ebenezer mission station, Hagenauer and Spieseke had requested wives to be sent to help them in their spiritual work on the mission, especially their work with female Aborigines.23 Friends of the missionaries within Australia, who were less aware of the pastoral role of Moravian women, wrote to the Moravian Church suggesting that wives were needed to help in the domestic sphere in order for the male missionaries to gain more time to proselytise.24 After some hesitation, and many drawings of the lot, the Church sent out the Moravian Sisters Christine Louise Knobloch and Christine Fricke from Germany. They arrived in Melbourne early in 1861, and soon thereafter began their work as female missionaries amongst Indigenous Australians, with Knobloch working at Ramahyuck with her husband Hagenauer and Fricke at Ebenezer with her husband Spieseke.25

The formal union of a heterosexual couple was also important in traditional Aboriginal life, ensuring the continuation of lineage and of social structures. Traditional marriage practices amongst Aboriginal Australians differed in various geographical locations depending on clan association, with intricate rules enacted to ensure the maintenance of complex social structures as well as to ensure exogamy. In a book published at the turn of the twentieth century, which was compiled from material collected over the preceding four decades or more, the anthropologist AW Howitt presented his postulations and observations on Aboriginal marriage customs. In his analogy, traditional Aboriginal marriage customs were as if ‘an English village had determined that its children should marry beyond its bounds, the sons bringing their wives to the village, while the daughters went to the villages whence their brothers took their wives’.26 Marriage was thus not seen as primarily a personal decision, rather as a public or communal decision undertaken to engender exogamy as well as to strengthen ties between communities. In his specific writings on the Gunai/Kurnai nation, which comprised the broader social and political category to which the men at the second Moravian mission in Victoria, the Ramahyuck mission station, belonged, he stated that men ‘could acquire a wife in one way only, namely, by running off with her secretly and with her own consent’,27 thus reflecting individual agency and the norms of romantic love popular within middle class Victorian England. Yet, as we shall read below, when the Moravian missionaries imposed their ideas of Christian marriage onto Kurnai men and Western Australian women, it did not mirror contemporary ethnographical thought, for on the mission station marriage was not intended to facilitate the reciprocity of the English village scenario, nor was it a secret pact between two willing individuals. For the missionaries, intra-racial marriages of Indigenous peoples on the mission stations were relationships forged under European understandings of the sanctity of the

23 19 May 1859, #22, PUAC, UA. See also, Missionsblatt, No 6, 1859, p. 116. In this passage Old Charley states that he would like to bring his daughter to the mission so that she can be schooled by the missionaries. As they were single, however, they did not feel able to teach her.
24 4 March 1860, #6, PUAC, UA.
25 4 April 1860, #9, PUAC, UA; 4 March 1860, #6, PUAC, UA.
26 Howitt 1996[1904]: 11.
institution of marriage in relation to Christian norms and gendered European normative codes of behaviour for individuals within this institution. Moreover, the partners within these marriages were expected to be good role models to the as-yet un-converted and un-married people on the mission.

A precedent is set: Rachel Wardekan, Caroline, and Anna

The conversion to Christianity of the Wotjobaluk youth, Nathanael Pepper, on the Ebenezer mission station in 1860 led the missionaries to contemplate a potential wife for him in order that he would be able to live a good Christian life and provide ‘a good example to the Blacks’. Unlike their own marriages, where brides were chosen through the drawing of the lot, Pepper’s wife was chosen for him by the missionaries. Through choosing a bride for him, the missionaries took control over Pepper’s private life and bound him to them through this act. The missionaries were constrained by religious, class and racial categories in considering a bride for Pepper as they desired a Christian woman of adequate education who would be a good role model for other Indigenous people on the station and therefore they only considered an Aboriginal woman as a potential mate for him. In different intercultural contexts such as North America, there was some acceptance of interracial marriage, especially if it was a European man marrying an indigenous woman. A European woman marrying an indigenous man was, however, akin to being conquered by the ‘other’ race. As the historian Kate Ellinghaus has demonstrated, it was unthinkable for a middle-class European woman to marry an Aboriginal man in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for Aboriginal men were seen to be ‘at the bottom of the scale, the extreme by which other inter-racial marriages were measured.’ Those lower class European women who did marry Aboriginal men, she further argues, were considered either to have been eccentric, or to have inverted the normative gender roles. As women were seen to be carriers of racial identity in the nineteenth century, it was not possible for the missionaries to perceive of an interracial marriage for either male or female converts. In their desire to create a model Christian community, the Moravian missionaries at Ebenezer did not wish for the converts of the mission station to be assimilated into broader colonial society. Instead, they desired Aboriginal people to marry other Aboriginal people and stay attached to the mission station. The symbolic capital of Aboriginal Christian men and women was deemed too important to be lost within the broader civilising project of the colony. This was especially so as converted Aboriginal women were seen as gendered role models for other as-yet-unconverted Aboriginal women.

There were, therefore, three major factors which led to the missionaries’ choice of an Aboriginal wife for Nathanael Pepper: contemporary European cultural

28 Committee of the Melbourne Association 1863: 4.
31 Ellinghaus 2006: 149.
CONTROLLING MARRIAGES

norms; contemporary racial expectations; and the need to retain Indigenous men and women on the stations as symbolic capital. In scouting for potential brides for their converts, the missionaries could not identify a single suitable, baptised Aboriginal woman amongst those women known to them, and thus the missionaries together with their supporters looked further afield. With the help of a Church of England minister, the Reverend Lloyd Chase, the Moravian missionaries came into contact with Mrs Anne Camfield, and her ‘Institution for Native and Half-Caste Children’, in which a number of unmarried Christian Indigenous women lived. This institution was established in 1852 near the present day town of Albany, some 430 kilometres south-east of Perth, in Western Australia, and some 3,000 kilometres west of Ebenezer on the other side of the continent. Camfield was an Anglican and opened the institution in a benevolent desire to provide for Aboriginal children. The institution included an orphanage and school and employed two Aboriginal assistants. Anne and her husband Henry provided shelter, food, education and care for 55 Indigenous children over almost 20 years. As with much of colonial Australia, the effects of colonisation in Western Australia greatly diminished Indigenous populations leaving many children without parental support, and even those with familial support were on occasion sent to European institutions in order to receive a Western education, often at the cost of Indigenous knowledge. Many of the children at Camfield’s home were sent there in their infancy and thus were raised within a European cultural framework that was imbued with Christian teachings and norms.

In 1863, an orphaned woman, Rachel Wardekan, was sent over from the institution in Western Australia to be Pepper’s wife. Deemed pious and Christian in nature, Wardekan was ideal for the civilising project. The young couple was married soon after she arrived at Ebenezer. This ritual was very much a public affair, and enacted the rites of passage of the normative Christian act. The very public element of the marriage was evident not only in the performative aspects of the wedding itself – which was staged in front of a large European and Aboriginal audience – but also within the expectations placed upon this union. The importance of their marriage was, according to contemporary commentators:

not to be measured by the amount of happiness it may confer on the young convert and his wife; but as they are living happily together, and setting a good example to the Blacks, it may well be anticipated that the words of Holy Scripture will be forcibly illustrated in the eyes of the heathen.

Pepper and Wardekan were married to provide a good role model for their own people – except Wardekan was not of Pepper’s people, and as her own associations to her people were severed when she was a child, her identity was replaced with that of ‘Christian Aborigine’. After living and working on the mission for a number of years, Wardekan died in 1869.

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33 For information about Rachel Wardekan see Harris 1990: 194, 202, 266.
34 Committee of the Melbourne Association 1863: 4.
35 19 May 1864, Diary entry of A and M Hartmann, E Hartmann collection, 1979 [hereafter EHC], Box 2 of 4, Moravian Archives Bethlehem, United States of America [hereafter MAB].
through the fact that the perceived success of her translocation from Western Australia to Victoria resulted in further Indigenous women being sent some 3,500 kilometres to marry Indigenous men at the Ramahyuck mission station in Gippsland. Hagenauer had established this mission station in 1862 with the financial support of the Presbyterian Church and from this new mission station he continued his contact with Camfield with the hope of more brides being sent over for men on the Ramahyuck mission station. One man who was to receive a bride from Western Australia was Jimmy, who took the name James Mathew when he became the first convert at Ramahyuck in March 1866. Mathew was, according to Hagenauer, ‘already greatly in love’ with the woman whom Camfield would send to him, even though at that stage it was not certain of the two women sent over as to ‘who’s is Jimmys [sic]’ wife. He was anxious to separate his imminent Christian conversion from his (material) desire to gain a wife. According to Hagenauer, ‘he declares, however, that he always stopped here [at the mission] for Jesus sake and not for the sake of getting a wife.’

Although Hagenauer ‘willingly believed’ Mathew’s claims, the association between Christianisation and obtaining material goods or wives was one made by Indigenous men themselves, demonstrating awareness of, and the ability to manipulate, the new social system evolving around them. This dual desire to get married and settle in houses was, according to Hagenauer, expressed not only by men upon the Ramahyuck mission station, but also on the government station of Corranderk. Thus, in Hagenauer’s mind, the civilising mission had affected a desire amongst Indigenous men to marry in a Christian manner, and to live a sedentary life on a mission or on a government reserve.

The two women who were sent for the converted men Jimmy/Mathew and Charley/Charles Jacob died before the marriages could take place. Caroline, who was betrothed to Jacob, died of fever in Melbourne, with Chase stating that ‘Instead of meeting her earthly bridegroom she met the Heavenly One.’ Anna, the woman intended for Mathew, also died of fever in a Melbourne hospital before she could be united with her betrothed, and before she could be of potential benefit to the civilising mission. Hagenauer was particularly disappointed by the death of these women, not only because he had financed their transportation, but because it was a great blow to his expectations for the mission station. When reporting the death of Anna to a religious colleague, the Presbyterian Rev AJ Campbell, in Geelong in the Colony’s south, Hagenauer expressed his distress, which was not directed towards the human loss of Anna – for Hagenauer had not met her personally – rather towards the loss of religious symbolic capital and also of funds. Yet even in his depressed state, he placed his faith in his omnipotent God, whose ways were ‘very misterious [sic]

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36 Hagenauer to Chase, 23 February 1866, Manuscript (MS) 3343, National Library of Australia [hereafter NLA].
37 Hagenauer to Chase, 23 February 1866, MS 3343, NLA.
38 Hagenauer to Campbell, 24 May 1866, MS 3343, NLA.
39 Hagenauer to Chase, 1 May 1866, MS 3343, NLA.
40 Hagenauer to Camfield, 21 May 1866, MS 3343, NLA.
41 Hagenauer to Campbell, 24 May 1866; Hagenauer to Reichel, 3 June 1866, MS 3343, NLA.
and dark before us’, yet ultimately would be revealed to those who waited.\textsuperscript{42} Hagenauer continued communicating with Camfield, and in 1867 the next group of Christian Aboriginal girls from Western Australian was sent to Ramahyuck, some of whom were seen as potential brides for converted Gunai/Kurnai men.

As the potential bridegrooms and brides were all converted to Christianity, or at least open to the Christian message, there was no prospect that either party to the marriage would have the ability to either convert their partner to Christianity or to draw them back into ‘heathendom’.\textsuperscript{43} The missionaries were concerned about apostasy – as evinced by their desire for both parties of a marriage to be Christian or under Christian instruction, not only so that they could be role models for other non-Christian Aborigines on the mission, but also to ensure that within the marriage the partners would be able to support each other in their individual and collective faith. Unlike some other religious groups, the Moravians did not practise mass conversion. The first converts of a Moravian mission station were expected to help spread the word of God amongst their fellow people and also to remain themselves as good role models for the other inhabitants of the mission.\textsuperscript{44}

Yet within the mission structure the Indigenous convert was always subordinate to the European missionary, a fact attested to well into the nineteenth century by the pronounced absence of ‘native churches’ – those run by native people. This absence reflected an implicit belief that Indigenous people were incapable of running their own churches.\textsuperscript{45} The hierarchical structure of the mission was augmented by the sexist and racist norms of the nineteenth century. Indigenous men were not seen as being suitable marriage candidates for white women, and Indigenous women were not seen to be strong enough in moral character to resist the influences of European men within broader colonial society. Indigenous women were seen to be in need of marrying ‘Christian Blacks’, lest they fall ‘prey to the evil passions of some bad whites.’\textsuperscript{46} Thus, in the question of whom Indigenous women would marry, it was both the religiosity and race of the men which were important factors for the missionaries as they arranged Indigenous marriages.

\begin{flushright}
\textbf{Under control: the marriages of Nora White, Rhoda Toby, Emily Peters and Ada Flower}
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In 1867, five more Aboriginal women from Camfield’s ‘Institution for Native and Half-Caste Children’ travelled to Ramahyuck where they were eagerly awaited by Hagenauer to be both brides for his converted men as well as role models for the Indigenous women on the mission station. Within this group was\

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Hagenauer to Campbell, 3 July 1866, MS 3343, NLA.
\item \textsuperscript{43} In the context of eighteenth century North America, Moravian missionaries there prevented marriages between Christian converts and non-Christian stating that it was ‘against apostolic rule’. See Wheeler 2006: 163.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Vogt 2006: 17.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Libbey 1869: 13.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Hagenauer to Chase, 15 January 1867, MS 3343, NLA.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushleft}
Bessy Flower, who has been the subject of considerable academic scholarship as an Indigenous Christian role model as well as a subsequent rejecter of many of the controlling mechanisms of the missionary institution. Her story will not be repeated here. The marriages of the other four women – Nora White, Rhoda Toby, Emily Peters and Ada Flower – have received no extensive academic or public attention. The examination of their marriages from the perspective of the missionary provides insight into the gendered roles they were expected to fulfil upon missionary stations, and how arranged marriages were used to control women through inclusion within a Christian institution.

Nora White brought her infant child with her to Ramahyuck. Reading between the lines of the communication between Hagenauer and Camfield, it can be supposed that it was due to her predicament that she was sent over to Victoria with the hope that a Christian Aboriginal man would assume responsibility for her and that through such a marriage her respectability would once again be redeemed. Before White’s arrival in Victoria, Hagenauer wrote to Camfield that he was:

> glad [that] you have written as openhearted about your Nora and I can assure you that we fully understand from experience with the poor and weak Blacks how such matters are and how carefully they must be continu[ally] attended if they shall not fall a pray [sic] to the passions of others. However matters may stand with Nora as they may it shall not make any difference to me and I believe that if she is well, it would be best that her journey should not be delayed to[o] long.48

Thus, in Hagenauer’s moral code, White’s pregnancy was a consequence of her weakness of character, which reflected the inherent moral weaknesses of Indigenous people. She was, however, still deemed important to the civilising mission, and Hagenauer already had a young man in mind for her who was seen as being ‘a very kindhearted man, and will only be to glad to get a wife who has been brought up well, the baby will not make any difference to him so.’49 Hagenauer suggested to Camfield that White and Rhoda Toby should travel together on the east-bound steamer. This would not only allow them to keep each other company, but – he insinuated – it would be better for their moral safety if they were in company. Eventually all five women were sent over together.

In July 1867, the same month in which the women arrived at Ramahyuck, both White and Toby were married to residents of the mission station. Following the lead of the public spectacle of Pepper and Wardekan’s wedding, the double wedding ceremony was held in front of 150 ‘whites’ and 70 ‘blacks’. White was joined in matrimony to Charley Foster, and Toby to a man called James.50 The spectacle was itself a public performance of the missionaries’ optimism for a
model Christian family and the hope attached to the flourishing of the mission. The women were not, however, the model Christians that Hagenauer had wished for, and he noted to a religious peer that, although it was of benefit to have the women at the station, they were in need of more Christian tutelage than first anticipated.\(^{51}\) Within a year of Nora White’s arrival, Hagenauer had become particularly disappointed in her. In his mind, she had been sent to Ramahyuck to fulfil her potential as a native Christian bride, yet he vilified her as having been ‘the worst of them all’.\(^ {52}\) He believed that she was responsible for having persuaded more than 60 people to leave Ramahyuck in order to find financial self-support though working off the mission station. This irritated Hagenauer no end, for he wished for Aboriginal people to be willing to hear the word of God on the station, and more pragmatically, he needed people to undertake the agricultural work on the mission station. He also believed White had goaded him when she distributed ‘her clothes among the women only to annoy and trouble’ him.\(^ {53}\) The ambiguity of Hagenauer’s Christian norms is evident in this episode insofar as the teachings of Christianity require people to care for their neighbours and help those in need. However, when White distributed her personal goods amongst other people on the mission station, Hagenauer – we can only image – deemed her to be shedding her markers of European civilisation, and thus deemed her to be upsetting his authority upon the station. His rules were not always defined, leaving uncertainty as to behavioural expectations. In this situation it is clear that White’s form of communal behaviour was not Hagenauer’s. For Hagenauer, White’s conduct was deplorable on both religious and moral levels. He saw her to be a bad influence on other Aboriginal women and as inciting insubordination amongst the residents of the mission. Hagenauer lamented to Ann Camfield, that,

[regarding] poor Nora, I do not know what to do especially as I have no legal power over her. Her husband wept about it and said she was making him miserable and bad, but he would not leave her because she was his wife, and I think he is correct. We must hope with her for the best.\(^ {54}\)

In this quote, there is an inversion of the gendered norms within marriage, as White’s husband Charley Foster is engaged in an emotive response to his wife’s corrupting, and implicitly promiscuous, behaviour and thus elicits the sympathy of the reader. However, emotive responses were also a mark of the evangelical religiosity of the Moravian Church, and therefore Foster’s weeping denotes not only his feminine, disempowered position within his marriage, but also as his attachment to Christian modes of religious engagement. His emphatic desire not to leave White because she was his wife, reiterates his position as a good Christian who was holding firm to his religious norms, despite the obvious disregard that his wife had for the institution. The ‘best’ which Hagenauer had

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\(^{51}\) Hagenauer to Mackie, 20 July 1867, MS 3343, NLA.

\(^{52}\) Hagenauer to Camfield, 6 February 1868, MS 3343, NLA.

\(^{53}\) Hagenauer to Camfield, 6 February 1868, MS 3343, NLA.

\(^{54}\) Hagenauer to Camfield, 6 February 1868, MS 3343, NLA.
hoped for in relation to White was that she could have become a role model of the submissive Christian woman. This was not, however, the mould in which White wished to be cast. Hagenauer’s desire to maintain the moral order of society was ineffective, for he had ‘no legal power over her’. As British subjects, Australian Aborigines were to be treated as such, yet from 1869 and into the 1880s a number of laws specifically curtailed the rights of Aboriginal people, including rights of residency, rights of access to material goods, and rights as parents, for the government could forcibly remove children.\(^{55}\) However, these laws were some years off. In his disempowerment at that time, Hagenauer reverted to slander. In February 1868, he complained that ‘Nora especially is worst [sic] than any other common bad lubras [Aboriginal women] in the district, and has given much anxiety to all of us’.\(^{56}\) By vilifying White through the derogative term of ‘bad lubra’,\(^{57}\) Hagenauer placed himself on a moral and spiritual high-ground, and thereby marginalised her further from his normative religious and moral codes.

Rhoda Toby was also seen as having been a less than ideal role model for other women on the station. She, along with White, had incited people to leave the station at the end of 1867, and Hagenauer was also disappointed in her. He was further disappointed that she neglected her religious obligations and did not attend church services. He had, however, some hope that she would be capable of being rehabilitated into his moral and religious codes, especially if she were to receive a ‘kind’ letter from Mrs Camfield, which Hagenauer deemed would ‘set her right and bring them back again to the station.’\(^{58}\) The tactic that Hagenauer employed here was one of coaxing through a third person, who had acted as a mother to the women. He was not able to threaten Toby with such actions as excommunication, which would have signified the loss of his approval, for Toby was already guilty in Hagenauer’s eyes of neglecting her Christian duties, and thus would not have been affected by any further loss of missionary approval. Hagenauer hoped to curtail both Toby and her husband through directing the cajoling attention of a third person onto Toby alone.

In Hagenauer’s pronouncements, it was always the women who were to blame. He complained that White and Toby were seen to have ‘persuaded their husbands to leave the station and find work somewhere else’, and not long after, ‘their husbands were very sorry for the demands of their wives’.\(^{59}\) Thus, although Hagenauer used marriage as an agent of control over Indigenous women, the women themselves were not controlled by marriage and could subvert this institution through influencing their husbands to adhere to their wishes – ones that must have always held the potential to clash with Hagenauer’s ideals for the social positions of Indigenous people.

\(^{55}\) McCorquodale 1986: 11.
\(^{56}\) Hagenauer to Mackie, 4 February 1868, MS 3443, NLA.
\(^{57}\) The term ‘lubra’ was used within colonial Victoria to denote a female Aboriginal person and due to its non-personal nature was derogatory. See Philips 1987: 40.
\(^{58}\) Hagenauer to Camfield, 6 February 1868, MS 3343, NLA.
\(^{59}\) Hagenauer to Camfield, 6 February 1868, MS 3343, NLA.
There had been no potential spouse awaiting Emily Peters when she arrived with the others at Ramahyuck. However, Hagenauer was soon concocting a plan for her to be safely within the confines of a morally upstanding Christian marriage. In reporting to Camfield about how the very public weddings of White and Toby had raised awareness of the plight of Christian Aborigines on the mission, he stated:

In reference to Emily I feel sure you will be glad that she is here safely, for Mrs Hagenauer has great fears that it may be with her as it was with Nora, when she came to you from the bush, and I thought best to tell Mr Chase about it. For the present it must be kept secret: so please do not mention it to anyone, it may not be so after all. Should it be as I suppose it would be best to get her soon married.60

In this letter, Hagenauer insinuated that Peters was pregnant. As she was not married this supposed pregnancy marked her as not adhering to Christian moral and sexual codes, and therefore not yet fully out of the clutches of ‘heathendom’. We can also read these remarks as reflections of Hagenauer’s own ideas of sex, gender, marriage, race and Christian morality. It does not appear that Peters was pregnant at this stage, although Hagenauer was keen to ensure that she would not fraternise with the opposite sex, and that any sexual intercourse would only occur within the institution of marriage. Moreover, as the sexual experiences of single women in the nineteenth century were positioned outside of the ‘normative boundaries of womanhood’,61 Hagenauer desired for Peters to be married as soon as possible in order for her to reposition herself within religious and cultural norms, and thereby to ensure that she would be utilisable as a role model for Aboriginal women on the station. In February 1868, Hagenauer communicated with Camfield that,

Emily was off with Nora, who had been about the home for a long time. Our windows are all nailed and the doors locked but she ran away before the door was shut. Bessy [Flower] and I went to where the Camp is and I stated that if Emily was not back in the morning I would send the Police ... In the presence of the Magistrate we asked [Emily Peters] kindly about everything and after earnest and full consideration we found the best would be to get her married, and under these circumstances I trust, my dear Mrs Campfield [sic] you give you consent to it. She was in love with Allen and he is a good man, therefore I thought it would be the best to get her out of temptation.62

Hagenauer had boarded up the windows and locked all the doors to ensure that Peters was forcefully kept within the building and ‘out of temptation’, with Hagenauer insinuating that this temptation was of a sexual nature. In running away before she could be locked in, Peters showed her defiance to Hagenauer’s

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60 Hagenauer to Camfield, 20 July 1867, MS 3343, NLA.
61 Fink and Holden 1999: 234.
62 Hagenauer to Camfield, 6 February 1868, MS 3343, NLA.
normative moral codes, which were not influential enough to curtail Peters’s resistance to the enforcement of the dominant religious hegemony. As his religious influence over Peters appeared to be ineffective, Hagenauer tried to influence her through turning to the political realm. In order to get Peters to adhere to the moral order of society, Hagenauer interviewed her ‘in the presence of the Magistrate’, coming to the conclusion that marriage would be the most suitable avenue to ‘get her out of temptation’, and thus to control her sexually. In colonial Victoria, there was no law forbidding miscegenation, nor a law which prescribed that Aboriginal people needed to receive permission from a governmental authority to marry. By the 1880s, however, it would be increasingly common for governmental officials to interfere with the potential matches between Indigenous people, especially those of mixed racial heritage. Although Hagenauer’s action of taking Peters to the magistrate was a legally empty threat, it was nevertheless a threat, and an indication that he wished to control her through marrying her off to a suitor of his choice.

Ada Flower was also deemed old enough to be married, with Hagenauer wishing that there was ‘another baptized man here who would keep her comfortable and on the Station’. Once this had transpired he believed ‘things would be right’. However, with ‘the very bad influence of Nora and the temptations from the heathen men it is not possible to keep [Ada out of temptation]’ Once again, Hagenauer’s normative moral structure becomes evident. As these Aboriginal women were seen to have been lacking Christian virtues and Victorian prudishness, it was thought that only through marriage would they be immune from the ‘temptations from the heathen men’, and beyond the reach of the ‘very bad influences’ of other females. By February 1868, Hagenauer’s wish for Peters was fulfilled as she was controlled through marriage, not to Allen, but to John Ellis, who in Hagenauer’s words was ‘a nice blackfellow and a candidate for baptism’ – thus, obviously a man who had potential to become a fully fledged Christian. Ellis was to be the first of Peters’s four husbands, and one with whom she would have one of her 16 children. It must be noted that the sheer number of men to whom Peters was joined in matrimony demonstrated her own regard for the institution of marriage, and thus from her perspective marriage may not have had the controlling connotations that Hagenauer’s perspective on marriage encompassed. Yet marriage was not the only instrument open to Hagenauer to curtail the rebellious nature of ‘his’ charges. In 1878, he banished Peters, along with her second husband, James Brindle, and their family from Ramahyuck, as they had been party to a letter of complaint written against Hagenauer and addressed to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. Hagenauer did not respond kindly to this act of insubordination, and effectively excluded Peters from the mission station, thereby discounting her as a potential role model for other Indigenous people at Ramahyuck. Through banishing Indigenous people...
from the mission stations for insubordination, Hagenauer, along with other missionaries in the colony, was able to maintain a controlled environment in which there was no place for people who questioned the moral authority of the reigning missionary.\textsuperscript{68} Initially Hagenauer had used inclusion through marriage as a tactic to control Indigenous women, but as time progressed and the women continued to defy his control, he reverted to more common methods exercised by missionaries across the world, such as exclusion through excommunication, or banishment.

Controlling marriage

Marriage can be used to achieve upward mobility and independence. This is evident in the fact that many lower class women in mid- to late-nineteenth century England actively pursued relationships which they perceived to have held potential financial benefits.\textsuperscript{69} Beyond and above the perceived individual material benefits of marriage there were also larger social ties involved, as women took on their husband’s social and cultural group after marriage. In introducing Western European ideas of marriage to Australian Aborigines, the Moravian missionaries drew on Indigenous traditions of formalised relationships that ensured the maintenance of complex social structures as well as exogamy. The missionaries, however, also brought with them racial and gendered ideas of Western European Christian marriages into which they placed Indigenous people on the mission station. Hagenauer’s motivation for much of his matchmaking was connected to his desire to have a well ordered mission in terms of gendered roles and of people adhering to his strict discipline. He followed Moravian norms that saw marriage as an institution that benefit the community, yet he also expressed his individual desires as to whom the women should be married, and the timing of their marriages was also determined by his desire to control the women’s sexuality or insubordination. The cases of the Aboriginal women presented here demonstrate that intra-racial marriages upon the mission station were used to reproduce European racial and gendered categories through the prism of religion. These case studies also demonstrate that Indigenous women were considered differently to Indigenous men, who were to receive a wife as a reward for converting to Christianity. In describing the progress of the five women to a religious colleague in 1877, Hagenauer’s disappointment was evident. Flower, he stated, was doing well and she had married Donald Cameron, who was Hagenauer’s right hand man. The two had been in charge of the orphan home for Aboriginal children, but Flower had tired of this role. Bessy’s sister Ada had passed away. White and Peters, it was said, both had big families, yet neglected their children and made trouble for Hagenauer. He wrote nothing of Peters, yet, as we have read above, she and her husband would be expelled from the mission in 1878 for raising their dissenting voices.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{68} For an example of another missionary banishing Aboriginal people from a mission station for an act of insubordination see: Philips 1987: 46.
\textsuperscript{69} Frost 1994: 224–245.
\textsuperscript{70} Hagenauer to Chaunery, 16 October 1877, MS 3343, NLA.
Before the women fell out of favour with Hagenauer, he had expressed hope for them all in contributing to the mission station. The unmarried single mother Nora White was quickly married off once she arrived at Ramahyuck, and through the ritualised ceremony redeemed her decency in the eyes of the missionary, and thus was capable of being seen as a role model for other women on the mission. Hagenauer deemed Emily Peters to be in need of marriage after she began to express her sexual desires, and in order to ‘get her out of temptation’, he saw marriage as an effective way of controlling her sexuality. These women were of use to Hagenauer’s mission through their roles in establishing Christian nuclear families and adhering to Christian norms. Although there were slightly different motivations behind marrying off each of these women, all of these marriages assisted Hagenauer in controlling the lives of these women. From the existing sources, it seems that the women had little agency in their betrothals, reflecting not only Moravian marriage traditions, but also some middle class English traditions, as well as some traditional Aboriginal traditions. To various degrees all the women seemed to have had some respect for the institution of marriage, with Emily Peters and her four marriages a case in point.

Marriage also bound these women geographically; initially to the location of the mission station, and when these ties were broken, the women were bound through marriage within the political entity of the Colony of Victoria, with no recourse to return to Western Australia. Around the time the women were married, there was an increased anxiety about how to manage the Indigenous population of Victoria, as indicated by the increasingly stringent and radicalised laws of 1869 and 1886. The 1886 Act known as the ‘Half-Caste Act’ legally differentiated between so-called ‘full’ and ‘half-caste’ Aborigines, and coincided with a stricter control over all aspects of Indigenous people’s lives, partly in order for the state to reduce its financial obligations to Indigenous peoples, partly in response to the racist attitudes of colonists. Hagenauer, as an advisor to the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines, took part in drafting this Act, and his contribution consequently betrays his assimilationist views. These views were in turn a change from his views of the early 1860s, in which intra-racial Christian marriages were the desired way to draw Aboriginal men and women further under the missionary’s control on the mission station through the institution of Christian marriage.

**Conclusion**

Matrimony has a multiplicity of meanings as well as expectations placed upon it, not least those placed upon it by Christian missionaries. The missionary examined here, Hagenauer, used marriage to redeem reputations, control sexuality, punish perceived licentious and insubordinate women, create role

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71 *Aborigines Protection Act*, 1869 (Vic); *Aborigines Protection Act*, 1886 (Vic).
models and to perpetuate racial and gendered norms. Recently there has been more academic attention placed on the roles of intimacy and sexual morality within colonial spaces, including how interracial marriages in the nineteenth century helped define and reflect cultural norms.\textsuperscript{74} There has also been some attention placed more specifically on the interracial marriages within nineteenth century Australia.\textsuperscript{75} There has, however, been little attention placed on arranged Indigenous intra-racial marriages facilitated by Europeans in the nineteenth century. In examining the arrangement of such marriages, the shifting attitudes toward Indigenous women becomes apparent. Hagenauer’s initial response to the women was to control them and their sexuality through marriage, and thereby to include them into the Christian mission as role models for other Indigenous women. The women themselves, however, were not controlled by marriage and after marrying Indigenous men connected to the mission station these women continued to maintain strong voices in opposition of what Hagenauer desired them to become. When Hagenauer’s tactic of marriage as an instrument of control failed, he reverted to standard missionary tactics such as exclusions and threats. Initially, however, Hagenauer wished to include Indigenous women into the Christian mission in order to achieve his goal of ‘raising’ the ‘heathen’ to European norms. The Christian institution of marriage offered Hagenauer a seemingly benevolent yet ultimately manipulative method of establishing and maintaining control over the lives of Indigenous women.

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Shamrock Aborigines: the Irish, the Aboriginal Australians and their children

Ann McGrath

‘Shamrock Aborigine’ is the sentimental nickname to denote Aboriginal Australians with Irish descent. The Shamrock’s green, round-leafed trinity has become a national and religious symbol of Irishness, associated with both Saint Patrick and good luck. This humble wild plant suggests closeness to the earth and a grounded sense of place. As a signifier for a rural people, it also evokes many intangible so-called national characteristics such as a quirky sense of humour, a cherished memory of magical creatures or faerie, a storytelling ‘gift of the gab’ and a love of emotive ballads. Moree’s Aboriginal rugby team is called the ‘Shamrock Aboriginal Warriors’. They wear green, white and a shamrock emblem. Earlier clues that Aboriginal people may have adopted the emblem include an 1890s nulla nulla with a shamrock carving. From the tablelands district of New South Wales, it is now held in the Australian Museum. Some contemporary Darug people believe their ancestors intermarried with the Irish to provide immunity from the near-devastating contagion of smallpox. In January 2009, controversial commentator Andrew Bolt used Mick Dodson’s Irish ancestry to question his assertions of an ‘Aboriginal’ identity. Dodson, the 2009 Australian of the Year, replied that he had not had to fight racism due to his Irish ancestry.

In August 2009, the newspaper Irish Echo published a list of the top 100 Irish Australians. This included bushranger Ned Kelly, the former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Aboriginal singer Kev Carmody and Aboriginal athlete Patrick Johnson. While yearning for ancestral stories may be a common human trait,
descendents of New World immigrants have turned the quest for Irish relatives into a favourite hobby. As if the roots of Irish-born Australians have not sunk deeply enough into their settling soil, they seek a sense of belonging from more ancient histories with deeper connections to place. For different reasons, people of Irish-Aboriginal descent are also becoming increasingly interested in their Irish ancestry.

Little research has been conducted on the relationships between Irish immigrants and Aboriginal Australians, or how Irish and Aboriginal peoples and their descendents have envisaged their relationship. By revisiting the work of the leading Australian historian Patrick O’Farrell (1933–2003), this article will reconsider his influential assertions and suggest directions for further work in the field. This article then considers why the offspring of Irish and Aboriginal parents and their descendents currently appear more willing to publicly entertain Irish ancestry and family associations than do the offspring of other European ethnic groups. It questions commonly held assumptions about the Irish and Aborigines, especially contemporary historical memory of sexual and marital intermixing. It also considers earlier assertions that the Irish were ‘good colonisers’ in Australia, or at least, were comparatively more benign colonisers than the Scots or English.

From the earliest convict intrusions onto Aboriginal soil, heterosexual unions and intermarriage took place between Aboriginal people and Irish – usually between Irish men and Aboriginal women. Aboriginal mothers and some Irish mothers produced offspring with Irish-Aboriginal identities. Early Irish arrivals to Australia were predominantly working class, including opponents of British rule in Ireland, and free immigrants. Forced convict transportation and in later years, extensive poverty-propelled immigration, brought them to Australia. Such historical experiences created Australian Irish identity narratives forged out of centuries-long histories of British imperialism. Many of the Irish at home had lost their land, freedom of movement and rights to govern, while population policies known as ‘plantation’ served to outnumber the Catholic Irish with Protestant English. While many Irish emigrants improved their fortunes in Australia, others certainly suffered more hard times, with mantras such as ‘the luck of the Irish’ and a plethora of sad ballads and stories echoing poignant historical memories.

**Connecting hemispheres**

Irish Australian ethnic identity has generally been associated with a common history of settler whiteness, which is the colour of coloniser power. While the Irish were certainly a ‘founding people’ in the story of white Australia, these founding moments also served to position Australia as a new locale for

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8 Read 2000.
continuing conflicts over the British domination of Ireland, with a proportion of Irish convicts being punished as rebels against British rule. Furthermore, the majority Catholic Irish arguably became ‘white Indigenous’, promoting themselves as ‘true Australians’ as opposed to the ‘British’ fellow-colonists.\textsuperscript{11} While retrospectively the Irish are now normalised and homogenised as part of the group known as ‘white pioneers’, there remains great ambivalence, if not deep contradictions, regarding the place of the Irish in what is labelled the British colonising project.\textsuperscript{12} We must not forget that at least 20 per cent of the Irish immigrants to Australia were Protestant. These were more likely to be middle and upper class, and some were inclined to more closely identify with Englishness and Britishness over Irishness.

Immigrant journeys from the ‘Old World’ to the ‘New’ span hemispheres and centuries. Amateur family histories and other publications have conceptually linked the chains of Irish poverty and oppression with the chains of convict transportation to Australia. American historian Richard White explored his Irish roots in Remembering Ahanagran, a book that became a meditation on uprooted yet continuing memory. Several books explore Irish Australian family histories. Australian novelist Christopher Koch’s The Many Coloured Land: an Irish memoir described travels in Ireland that linked him with an Irish convict ancestor transported to Tasmania.\textsuperscript{13} For many, Irish Australian journeys provide opportunities for a more introspective, familial or ancestrally-connected kind of identity tourism. As demonstrated by Oliver MacDonagh writing TheSharing of the Green: a Modern Irish History for Australians, the concept of diaspora allows for more than one homeland.\textsuperscript{14}

To complicate this, however, in the last decades of the twentieth and during the twenty-first century, Australians of Aboriginal descent are also publicly identifying as Irish and some have journeyed to connect with Old World places and people. Indigenous Australian participants have performed their music, song and storytelling at Celtic festivals in various parts of Ireland, as well as in Brittany, France. As Aboriginal art gains an international following, Indigenous artists and art exhibitions have toured various Irish cities and towns. When visiting the Country Clare museum in Ennis in 2007, I noticed Aboriginal art for sale in the entrance to the old town centre building. Deeper inside was an exhibition on the great migration of Clare’s population to the New World. In 1990, during the very early phase in the commercial Aboriginal art movement, Kathleen and Temerre Petyarre travelled to Dublin to open an exhibition at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin. The significant Robert Holmes a Court collection of batik was entitled Utopia – A Picture Story after their own cattle station country. These artworks, which travelled to Limerick and Cork galleries, depict deep personal connections with ‘country’ as Indigenous people call their traditional lands in English, which include places of ancestral

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{11} The anonymous assessor assisted with some of these insights.
\bibitem{12} See Walter 2000.
\bibitem{13} Koch 2008. Bergin 2000 is a self-published example.
\bibitem{14} MacDonagh 1996.
\end{thebibliography}
dreaming journeys. An Australian historian attending this event, Bob Reece, described Gaelic poetry readings that promoted a ‘natural, indeed a primeval, cultural bond between Irish and Australian Indigenous peoples’ – an ‘Hiberno-Australian indigenality’. Whatever the different players make of such travels and exchanges, this Aboriginal Australian and Irish nexus is starting to reroute the old migration and historical itineraries.

Assimilators?

So what is the explanation for this relatively congenial and increasingly connected relationship between Irish and Aboriginal roots? In his influential tome, The Irish in Australia, historian Patrick O’Farrell argued that the assimilationist tendencies of the Irish in Australia set them apart from Irish immigrants elsewhere. Unlike the Irish who migrated to the United States, they did not form ethnic enclaves. This was partly due to their willingness to speak English, but more so due to their practice of intermarrying with Scots, English and Welsh. These patterns led to social assimilation and integration into the wider Australian community.

Patrick O’Farrell’s observations on the subject of Irish/Aboriginal interactions have been particularly influential. O’Farrell had stated:

Relations between the Irish and Aborigines were generally of the kind indicated by the Aboriginal writer Faith Bandler, recalling her childhood in northern New South Wales. In contrast to Protestant paternalist or exploitative whites, Irish Catholics treated the Aborigines as human beings, as equals…

Bandler, however, was not Aboriginal. She based her popular book Wacvie upon her father’s story as a Pacific Island indentured labourer. Although O’Farrell placed his own comments in parenthesis - almost as an aside - he went on to extend his intermarriage hypothesis beyond British integration. Indeed, O’Farrell daringly argued that the Irish were not as sexually exploitative as other ethnic groups. Further, the Irish viewed Aborigines with:

[A]n equality extending to marriage, as distinct from the sexual exploitation common in white relations with Aborigines: the ‘shamrock/Aboriginal’ names prominent among contemporary Aboriginal activists testifies to that relationship.

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15 Reece 2000: 192. See also Brody 1990.
16 Reece 2000: 193. He notes the actions of Irish Australians such as Paul Keating. Keating was the first Prime Minister to acknowledge historical wrongs in the Redfern Speech, and he brought in native title legislation.
19 As an activist in Aboriginal rights struggles during 1960s, Bandler’s dark complexion and strong identification with the Aboriginal rights movement, led others to make the same error. See Lake 2002; Bandler 1977, 1983.
In other words, the Irish were the group more likely to cohabit with, acknowledge and rear children with Aboriginal women. These comments have crucial relevance to the wider history of British colonialism in Australia. It is difficult to know whether O’Farrell was simply echoing a more widely held belief, following a personal hunch, or whether he had gleaned more solid knowledge from his extensive historical readings.

So we need to look at the only supporting evidence he cites: surnames. While ‘shamrock Aboriginal’ names may now be common, Irish surnames provide neither proof of an Irishman’s paternity, nor public recognition of their children. Under the new colonial and state administrations, a ‘surname’ was required for records of such things as blanket handouts, the census and general identification. Aboriginal people spoke their own languages and practiced complex naming protocols according to age, kin, events and other factors, but none involved patrilineal ‘surnames’. Initially it was the police or officials who were required to enter ‘sur’ names in their records, but sometimes the Aboriginal mothers volunteered suitable names. Children of mixed Aboriginal and other descent were often named after their employers – and sometimes this, too, was an actual indication of the likelihood that these could be the actual biological fathers. Adults were also commonly named after the stations on which they lived. In various jurisdictions, the local police – many of Irish stock – collected the census data. They allocated their own names to local Aboriginal people for official purposes. Or so they said. Although they did not openly acknowledge or rear them, many such policemen biologically fathered children to Aboriginal casual or long-term partners. Cohabiting with Aboriginal women carried a social stigma amongst the coloniser community. By the turn of the nineteenth century, and the first half of the twentieth century in Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, it was illegal for white men to cohabit with Aboriginal women and they had to seek special permission to marry them. Many of the male partners permitted to marry under state law were not so much prompted by egalitarianism as by the threat of large fines and imprisonment. For many, however, it took courage to openly declare these illicit partnerships and to try to keep families together, which some did.

O’Farrell’s other assertion that the Irish were less paternalistic and exploitative, and were essentially egalitarian towards the Aborigines, must be viewed with caution. It would be extremely difficult to substantiate this from an empirical survey. How does one assess benevolence versus malevolence on the frontier? Possibly a scholar could revisit massacre statistics and try to research proportionately how many murders were committed by Irishmen and women, but due to the nature of the sources, this would be highly problematic, if not impossible. Furthermore, the intimate, often hidden sphere of sexual and familial relations is frequently missing from the archival record.

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Although travellers themselves, many of the early Irish Australians held unflattering notions of semi-nomadic and travelling people. They had been internal migrants in Great Britain, convict deportees and free immigrants whose single men became highly mobile workers travelling around the countryside. Newcomers alienated from their own country had plenty to fear from the Aboriginal people whose lands they were usurping. When convicts ventured onto the lands of Aborigines, they lacked armed protection, and it was hardly surprising they were at first terrified by the strangers. (In contrast, the more highly educated, intellectually curious and military-backed governors such as Phillip and Macquarie could sometimes afford to be more humane and tolerant.)

Some Irish convicts had a bad reputation. In the early nineteenth century, the London Missionary Society’s Lancelot Threlkeld reported horrific incidents of rape, robbery and general ill-treatment of Aborigines by ‘croppies’ or escaped convicts living as bushrangers or outlaws. Members of a convict underclass could be more likely to be cruel to their social inferiors, being under greater direct threat from them. Yet, co-operation and collaboration could ensure their survival; a peace could be made between Aborigines and Irishmen and women who formed relationships of mutual dependence. Immigrants keenly sought Aboriginal women for sexual and marital partnerships, especially so, given the disproportion of immigrant men in the frontier districts.

Yet, some accounts of Irish colonising anxiety are disturbing. Pastoralist Alexander Crawford, an Ulster man who had moved onto Aboriginal lands in what is now the Murchison district of New South Wales, was one of the better off, Protestant immigrants from Ireland. O’Farrell’s collection of letters awkwardly placed Crawford’s correspondence in a section entitled ‘Love Story’. Yet Crawford’s neighbours called him a tyrant because, unlike other masters, he would not allow the white men working on his station to ‘keep black women’ there. Crawford was neither egalitarian nor likely to marry an Aboriginal woman. However, perhaps in expressing his distaste for such mixed liaisons, he protested too loudly.

Crawford was certainly involved in violent captures and cruelties towards Aboriginal men killing sheep, and in May 1883, Aboriginal people nearly killed him in retaliation. Back in Ireland, Crawford’s family were appalled at having a relative on a murdering rampage. His father foresaw more trouble, warning in his charming style:

I hope you are getting on with the natives better, your Aunt Matty says kindness goes far with them. Probably if you tried some of this you might do better. But I am sure you are kind naturally, yet you are too

28 Cited in O’Farrell 1984: 73.
much inclined to drive men more than lead. But most likely your views on this point may have been modified before now. My mother used to say never use the broken reed if love will do the deed.29

Letters from Lillie Mathews ridiculed him for not learning enough of the local Aboriginal language to be understood.30 Another violent skirmish on the property thwarted Alexander’s marriage plans to this beloved Australian-based cousin. If only he had listened to Aunt Matty’s pointed advice, he might have married her sooner.

With Crawford still seeking vengeance against Aborigines for taking his sheep, Lillie wrote on Sunday to admonish him:

It is a dreadful thing to be continually hunting down ones fellow creatures, for they are our fellow creatures and have precious and immortal souls. Oh my darling keep your hands free from your fellow creature’s blood. For you to need to fire on them makes me feel miserable. It seems dreadful when really in your heart you cannot blame them for taking the sheep. They don’t know right from wrong.31

Lillie tried to remind Crawford of the common humanity of the Aboriginal people:

We are, I know, apt to look down on them as something little better than beasts, but remember darling they have souls as well as we, and don’t let them rise up in judgement against us in the last great day. ... Oh my darling keep yourself free from any stain of these poor creatures.32

Alexander’s Irish-based Protestant relatives feared his Australian experience had not only corrupted him personally, but that it might endanger the souls of his entire family. They and the Australian-based Lillie were worried as Christians, seemingly less concerned about Alexander’s safety than their own immortal fates.

The majority group, the Catholic Irish, suffered racism in nineteenth-century Australia and were derogatively compared with Aboriginal people.33 Contemporary commentators like Dr A Thompson asserted that the Irish were intellectually inferior to the Australian Aborigines. Pastor Samuel Marsden classed the Irish convicts as a ‘wild, ignorant and savage Race’.34 Others stated that the Irish were ‘pre-modern, pre-industrial, their very existence superseded by progress, commerce, science, invention, the arrogances of the nineteenth century: like the Aborigines, the Irish were primitive, backward, outmoded,  

34 The Irish Catholics also did a lot to discredit Marsden.
the butt of impatience and contempt’. Going further, the Irish were equated with chimpanzees and orangutans and ridiculed as of ‘africanoid’ appearance. Although the Scottish were also considered lowly, the Irish were consistently rated as inferior to them too. Throughout much of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Australia, Anti-Irish and anti-Catholic thinking reinforced social, class and political divisions.

**Disentangling colonising colours**

Whiteness studies has analysed the power of the category ‘white’, which became especially relevant in the context of settler-colonialism. However, ‘whiteness’ needs to be carefully historicised in different periods and contexts. Historian Don Watson demonstrated how the Caledonians or Scottish highlanders were classed as ‘black’ and compared with ‘Aborigines’. American author Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White* dramatised this in race and labour relations and identity studies. Jon Stratton argued that by the 1880s, the likes of influential federationist Alfred Deakin needed to recast the Irish as ‘white’ as part of a homogenised sense of an Australian race and future ‘white’ nation.

Empowered by their imperial status, settler colonisers had stakes in differentiating themselves from Indigenous Australians. After all, they were in the process of usurping them from their land. While the term ‘Anglo-Celt’ indicated cultural fusion, it could also suggest greater unity and common purpose than actually existed in the colonies at any specific historical moment. Initially, according to O’Farrell, some of the Irish immigrants in nineteenth-century Australia spoke a different language to the English, Gaelic and most sounded different to the English, not only in accent and intonation, but in the way they expressed themselves and thought. They saw themselves as ethnically distinct and they were predominantly Catholics rather than Protestants. While some may have shared a specific identity, and dressed and looked different, the convict label saw Irish and English lumped together wearing similar attire. Although race categories were fluid in the first half of the nineteenth century, and living and working alongside each other could lead to rapid cultural fusions, according to O’Farrell, Irish distinctiveness sometimes saw them as more than just an ‘ethnic sub-group’ of Britishness or a mere faction of the white colonisers. What O’Farrell’s generalisations sometimes gloss over, however, are the class differences, and the 20 per cent of Protestant Irish hailing from many different parts of Ireland, some of whom were prominent and wealthy citizens of influence.

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39 See Lake and Reynolds 2008.
40 Watson 1997.
By giving so much attention to ‘skin’, the whiteness studies umbrella could further homogenise ‘race’ and ethnic categories, missing the significance of class, ethnic, religious and national identities.\(^{44}\) For example, Chris Healy’s *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory* does not contain a single index entry on the Irish.\(^{45}\) Historian Ann Curthoys’ important article, ‘Expulsion, exodus and exile in white Australian historical mythology’ fuses Anglo and Celt into one group. She explains how Australian coloniser narratives emphasise histories of expulsion and exile,\(^{46}\) a strategy that enabled them to see themselves as victims and to avoid being guilty ‘colonisers’ at all. While Curthoys’ repeated references to ‘Anglo-Celt’ narrative strategies accurately reflected fused national narratives, surely it would be worth disentangling and effectively probing the specific development and influence of Celtic or Irish strategies. As Bob Reece’s 1991 study, entitled *Exiles from Erin: Convict Lives in Ireland and Australia* suggests, the Irish have understood themselves as colonialism’s victims in quite distinctive ways.\(^{47}\) Perhaps renewed emphasis is now required not only on the difference of the Asian, Pacific and other ethnic groups that settled in Australia, but on *difference* amongst the British colonisers in various timeframes.\(^{48}\) Only by separating the strands of ‘Anglos and Celt’ can historical studies of colonialism and memory tease out Irish from other influences.

Recognising the significance of the Irish to Australian Labor Party and trade union history, Prime Minister Bob Hawke launched O’Farrell’s monumental *The Irish in Australia* in 1988. No fan of Aboriginal land rights or symbolic recognition of Aboriginal oppression, O’Farrell saw Aboriginal oppression as part of a longer historical trajectory of oppression by Britain. As he entertained no hopes for the indigenous Irish regaining lost lands, he entertained no hopes of special entitlements for the Aborigines. While O’Farrell recognised the complexity, divisions, the different historical memories and the conflicting ‘fairytales’ amongst his chosen subjects, his was a sentimental, nationalistic mission to provide a fond and humane account of the Irish in Australia. He wrote eloquently: ‘At any time, these were ambivalent, ambiguous people, thinking Irish, talking English; hating the tyranny, serving the tyrant’.\(^{49}\) His Irish were a flawed lot. But for him to go further – to feature them as Godless, immoral sexual exploiters, or indeed violent colonisers themselves, was personally abhorrent. Not only would it do his ancestors too great a disservice, it would equate them too much with the English.

In the twentieth century, many Irish men, like other poor whites, travelled to northern frontier districts to make a living. Drover Matt Savage told a story of an Irish cook Mick Sharkey who eked out his subsistence by killing Aboriginal people’s dogs around Bradshaws Run in the Victoria River District in the

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\(^{45}\) Healy 1997.

\(^{46}\) Curthoys 1999: 1–18.

\(^{47}\) Lake and Reynolds 2008; Reece 1991.

\(^{48}\) This has also changed in recent times, as attested by autobiographical writing like Kinnane 2003.

\(^{49}\) O’Farrell 1987: 5.
1910s; a bounty on scalps netted good cash returns. When an angry group of local Aboriginal people confronted him, brandishing clubs, he started weeping, lamenting his loneliness and his distance from his homeland, and blubbering in fear that they would kill him. Before very long, the local Aboriginal people were weeping in sympathy for the poor displaced national. As the story goes, they then helped him obtain the scalps of a few more ‘useless dogs’.50

The Irish, and historians of Irish descent, as well as the Aboriginal people they encountered, were all keen to find agreeable narratives. Whilst some may have appreciated the benefits of a more fluid Australian society and perhaps even thanked the monarch who presided over it, the Irish brought a range of stories of British imperialism to Australian shores, and distinctly Irish nuances soon appeared early in colonising narratives. Accepting that intermarriage between Anglo and Celts justified identity fusion, Irish descendants still had strong historical and emotional reasons to discretely identify themselves as colonialism’s exiled victims. The shared oppression of the Aboriginal and Irish people by the British gave them common historical ground as the ‘colonised’ class – even if they ended up later fighting over the same Australian ground, and the same Aboriginal women.

The children

Since the publication of the Bringing Them Home Report in 1992, the topic of Australia’s ‘stolen children’, or the removal of children of Aboriginal and of Aboriginal and mixed descent from their Aboriginal families, has gained considerable attention.51 Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s Apology in Parliament in February 2008 became a national moment of recognition for the historical suffering of Indigenous Australians.52 The Report itself contained horrendous stories of cultural loss, emotional and familial damage. Until the 1970s in New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and elsewhere, Aboriginal children and particularly those of mixed descent were removed from their parents.

While generally we imagine that removal severed Aboriginal people away from their Aboriginal families, child removal also severed them from many of their Irish, English and Chinese fathers and occasionally, from their Irish mothers. It severed them from immigrants who returned to Ireland. In the burgeoning field of autobiography of the 2000s, numerous people of Aboriginal descent now refer to their mixed European, Asian and family backgrounds. Some have also pursued their family histories in England, Europe and China.53 New, reflexive Indigenous narratives interpreting colonising history also continue to emerge.

50 Willey 1971: 17–18.
51 Haebich 2000; Read and Edwards 1989.
In the intimate unions between Irish and Aborigines that followed the convict arrivals from distant Britain after 1788, at least two histories of colonialism met, with complex and fraught historical legacies. The ambiguous status of the Irish in the British colonising project contained challenges for the children of Irish and Aboriginal parents. In the sexual and familial relations between Indigenous and Irish Australians, and in the generations that followed, the categories ‘invader’ and ‘invaded’; coloniser and colonised become unstable. However hapless they might see themselves, Irish Australians formed a large chunk of Australia’s ‘settlers’ or colonisers, and there could be no getting away from being implicated in dispossessing Indigenous Australia. When the Irish tried to fuse an older historical identity as an oppressed people, with a new one in which they were labelled oppressors, a narrative rupture arose.

Whether poor or wealthy, many Irish fathers found child removal a useful tool to hide their secrets and sins. Policies varied between different colonies and states, and in northern Australia during the twentieth century, such unions were legally restricted. However, the known cases suggest that married Irish Catholic pastoralists were as likely as other colonisers to banish the offspring of their Aboriginal mistresses. Many were simply shirking financial responsibility. Some wealthy fathers paid for Catholic boarding schools, but that did not mean that they publicly recognised the child as their own offspring. (Over the past ten years, some of these children and grandchildren have come forward to tell their previously suppressed stories.)

If not improving heavenly prospects, colonial life provided opportunities for Irish men and women’s economic and social advancement and status. Therefore, an additional reason for Irish men to keep their partnerships quiet was that any marriage with Aboriginal women, the class dispossessed of all land and property, would destroy prospects of social respectability.

If education in English, and intermarriage, were dual tools of ethnic assimilation, in this case, we have to ask who was assimilating whom – the English or the Irish? (While the influence of Indigenous culture and life-ways upon Irish and other immigrants should not be dismissed, there is not the extant research or the space here to assess this kind of cultural influence.) One of the government justifications for Aboriginal and mixed-descent child removal was certainly to provide literacy and western-style education. Here again, the Irish in Australia would empathise with their homeland situation, as English was often used in preference to Gaelic as the language of learning and of state, legal and religious authority. Keen to gain social mobility, Irish immigrants in Australia voluntarily opted to blend in with the general white population rather than asserting difference. Aboriginal people suffered a government-enforced cultural assimilation policy. During the post-World War Two era, Aboriginal assimilation aimed at cultural and economic ‘uplift’, yet racial discrimination against

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55 For a related article on paternity see Probyn-Rapsey 2009.
57 Van Toorn 2006.
Aboriginal people and their offspring eroded many of the possibilities for social and economic advancement enjoyed by immigrants. Furthermore, immigrants often had prior knowledge of how to deal with displacements and relocations that took place in Britain. Amidst the state project of land take-over, Aboriginal people’s ongoing desire and struggle to hold onto their lands often forced them into a direct oppositional relationship to the state.

What is more, due to discriminatory laws, policies and racial attitudes, throughout much of the twentieth century, many Aboriginal people sensibly avoided identifying as Aboriginal. Only after improved civil rights from the 1970s were more Aboriginal Australians of mixed descent willing to positively identify and expose their families to the consequences. Identity politics then turned full circle. Aboriginal rights activists urged people of mixed descent to identify as ‘Aboriginal’ – and only Aboriginal. While the McGinness family of Darwin cherished their Kungarakany culture and were the first group to have their traditional land claim heard in the Northern Territory, Kathy Mills (nee McGinness) objected to being described as ‘part Aboriginal’ and not also as ‘part European’ or Irish. When she presented a paper to this effect at the 1980s Women & Labor Conference in Melbourne, the audience was not yet ready for such multiple identities, but times are changing.

The Irish’s historical reputation

Until the 1980s, Irish studies and Irish history in Australia represented a core strand in Australian historical study. Historians noted the large proportion of Irish convicts and their major role in forming the basis of the Australian population, ethos and nation. They explored their radical challenge to the English-led state, their roles in key rebellions, outlawry and other challenges to authority. Russel Ward’s Australian Legend and particularly his chapter ‘Celts and Currency’ attributed Irishness as foundational to the evolution of an egalitarian, working class culture that morphed into a distinctive (white male) Australianness. The feminist historian Miriam Dixson’s The Real Matilda took the shine off the masculinist legend, attributing Irish influence to many less admirable national characteristics, including Australia’s drinking culture, and some of its sexist practices. More recently, historian Anne O’Brien has reminded us out how, during the 1810s and 1820s, the Irish were feared as a threat to the British settlement. In the earliest convict settlements of the late eighteenth century, the English authorities even feared that the Irish would join ranks with the Aborigines and ‘overtake the colony’.

58 Haebich 2008.
59 The author convened this panel.
60 Ward 1958.
With the rise of race relations and Aboriginal history studies from the late 1970s, the history of the Irish in Australia gradually came to be seen as less attractive: as white, masculinist and mainstream – as part of the dominant group of coloniser invaders. Worse, Aboriginal activists and historians started to discuss white men’s rape and sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women. When the National Museum of Australia (NMA) opened in 2001 under the regime of Prime Minister John Howard, it was attacked for favouring the so-called ‘black armband’ view of Australian history and accused of exaggerating frontier violence and giving too much prominence to Aboriginal history over white. In this context, a proposal to stage an exhibition on the Irish, including their usual bunch of rebels and radicals, was comparatively reassuring, if not exactly ‘relaxed and comfortable’. While this venture did not proceed, another is being planned. In 2002–2003, the museum staged an exhibition Outlawed! Rebels, Revolutionaries and Bushrangers, where none other could match the drawcard status of the national Australian hero Ned Kelly. Yet, Ned’s Jerilderie letter was hardly inclusive, spitting out bitter, murderous and ever-colourful messages proclaiming ethnic Irish anger at English injustice.

In the twenty-first century, popular blogs like that of Bob Gould keep alive both Irish nostalgia and a powerful desire for not only nationally redemptive narratives, but also ethnically-specific Irish ones. The ‘Iron Outlaw’ site on the Kelly gang contains many references to Irish oppression. As neither Marxist nor Aboriginal, Ned Kelly epitomised a cherished, albeit controversial icon where Irish anger has become generalised white Australian anger at English authority, class and state oppression.

Heaven or Hell

My own family’s story is instructive on the selectiveness of Australian identity narratives, for we grew up thinking that we were Irish through and through. My Australian-born grandmother, Nana Morris, was indeed a Clancy of Irish stock. My grandfather was an Australian-born son of a Galway-born McGrath. My paternal grandmother, however, was Scottish-born and raised in Kirkintilloch until the age of 16 before immigrating. These Scottish Egans identified as both Irish and Scottish. Then, on my father’s side, my great-grandmother was born illegitimate in Manchester. My maternal grandfather was Australian-born

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64 Saunders and Evans 1992.
65 The then Prime Minister John Howard stated that Australians should be able to feel more than shame and guilt about their history; rather they should feel ‘relaxed and comfortable’ about it. For a fuller examination of the History wars, see Macintyre 2003.
of English Anglican stock. So, despite an English born great grandmother on one side, an English-born great grandfather on the other, and a Scottish-born grandmother, we were still ‘Irish’ and did not question why only our Irish roots were to be valorised. Like many other intermarried Australian families, our family was not exclusively Irish by birth or ethnic background, but we imagined ourselves as Irish. Essentially, Irish was our preferred identity.

Furthermore, the Australian Catholic Church, which ran a comprehensive system of primary and secondary schools around Australia, encouraged the love of Erin. Catholic-run Aboriginal missions in remote Australia, and powerful Australia-run Catholic school system in rural towns and cities spread the virtues of Irishness to white and black children. Their teachers were often from poor backgrounds themselves, and they often accepted children excluded from New South Wales government schools on the basis of Aboriginality and those unable to pay.\textsuperscript{69}

During the 1950s–1970s, numerous nuns and priests had come from Ireland or were of Irish stock.\textsuperscript{70} The school and church system powerfully reinforced a collective Irish Australian identity from the earliest years, with its special Catholic school textbooks and publishers. In the 1960s, even the Australian-born nuns who taught me railed against the media practice of referring to the ‘Roman Catholic church’, for they insisted they were not Roman. If religion had to have a nationality, they would only settle for Irish Catholic. When I visited Ireland for the first time during the Settler Colonialism conference in 2007 I saw the same religious décor of my childhood’s 1960s Australian churches, with an identical selection of pious and maternal Virgin Mary statues, celibate French saints like St Therese of Liseux and Sacred Hearts of both Jesus and Mary.\textsuperscript{71} Australian Catholic religious identity became a form of Irish identity.

Since the 1990s, the links between Australian Indigenous and Irish convict disposessions have created new alliances between church and Indigenous communities. The Catholic Left was prominent in Reconciliation, native title, in organisations like Women for Wik, the stolen children campaigns and in inclusive Indigenous theological approaches and church services. In 2009, Aboriginal singer Archie Roach sang at a fund-raiser to stop the Catholic church’s sale of St Brigid’s church, which was established in the 1850s by victims of the famine who immigrated to Victoria. The common bond here was not common ancestry, for he has not associated with Irish identity, but rather, common disposessions and enforced community ruptures. Roach is a Gunditjmara man and it was his traditional lands to which the famine refugees sailed, then settled and built that church.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{69} Goodall 1996; Mason 2008; Reece 2000. For a valuable comparative study, see Coleman 2007.
\textsuperscript{70} Catholicism also featured in mid-century politics, with a key split in the Labor Party and the formation of the Catholic-based Democratic Labor Party.
\textsuperscript{71} Campion 1987; Massam 1996.
Over the last 15 years, historians of empire began to pay serious attention to intermarriage across colonising frontiers. ‘Bodies in contact’ created a key tension and anxiety for colonisers and empire. Intermixing and intermarriage was commonplace between non-Aborigines and British of various ethnicities from the early nineteenth century through to the present. Ellinghaus, Henningham, Haskins, Maynard, Hannah and myself have written on the subject. But, unless discussing ‘Asians’ and non-white ‘others’, these studies inevitably refer to Aborigines intermarrying ‘white’ men or women. To date, scholars have not singled out Irish intermarriage for special attention, nor considered its impact on dual identity formation.

Perhaps this is not surprising, as fact-finding about Irish/Aboriginal intermarriage is difficult. Firstly, who truly fits into the category of Irish? How are they identified as such? Do we include only Irish-born, or second or third generation? Is Irishness based on birthplace, culture, religion or parentage? If we accept the latter, is this born in Australia, or born in other parts of Britain outside of Ireland? Or could they also be born in America? Do both parents have to be Irish, or just the mother or father, or grandfather? What is the appropriate descent percentage? If it a matter of self-identification, that evidence is not available. Although colonial and later state regulations did create their own special marriage archives, it is difficult to quantify Irish unions with Aboriginal women and to measure the degree of acknowledgement of their children. Some archival repositories prevent the use of real names and recent scholars choose to obscure them for privacy reasons. Possibly the best evidence can only be gleaned from insider perspectives, when more Aboriginal people research their own family histories.

Traps abound for any researcher. For example, bush traveller and author Bill Harney (1895–1962) was one of a few white men who openly acknowledged and published accounts of his relationships with Aboriginal women during the first half of the twentieth century. His autobiography seems to fit O’Farrell’s ideas about Irishmen’s behaviours when partnering Aboriginal women. While known to have enjoyed numerous Aboriginal girlfriends, Harney had legally married the 17-year-old Aboriginal Kathleen Linda Beattie at Groote Eylandt chapel. Harney was a hard-living ‘bush raconteur’ of the irreverent kind glorified in the Bulletin and in Ward’s Australian Legend. The fact that he found his Aboriginal nickname ‘Bilarney’ or ‘Blarney’ such a great joke led me to assume he was of Irish descent. The famous Blarney Stone of Ireland’s Blarney Castle near Cork was a nice allusion to his penchant for story-telling. The Irish legend has it that whoever kisses the Blarney Stone acquires eloquence, or in local parlance, the ‘gift of the gab’. The Blarney Stone has another twist – that of ‘soft talk’ meant to

74 McGrath 2005.
deceive without necessarily offending. The colloquial ‘a lot of blarney’ was used in Australia for a made up story, ‘bullshit’ or in Aboriginal parlance ‘gammon’. The ‘blarney’ legend mocks and scoffs its own promise, perhaps reflecting not only the Irish penchant for storytelling, but also a sense of humour and self-mockery the Irish had in common with, and enjoyed sharing with Aboriginal people.

Harney and his wife had children together during the 1920s and 1930s, but both his wife and the children died young. His child to another woman – this time to a Wardaman woman in the Katherine area in 1936, took the name Bill Harney, identifying as the author’s son. Although similar to WEH Harney senior in appearance and character, he was not reared by him, but by his mother Ludi Yibuluyma and his Aboriginal stepfather. Bill is a renowned storyteller of Indigenous creation stories. Despite his liking for the ‘blarney/billarney’ appellation, Bill Harney senior may not have been Irish at all. Possibly he encouraged it as an attractive, suitable label for a roving bushman who rebelled against propriety. My assumptions about his Irishness were first thrown by a quick check of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, which stated his parents were London-born. Harney is both an Irish and an English name. However, it is also possible that the Harneyes hailed from the ‘London Irish’, earlier displacements leading to their emigration. Even in a relatively well-known life, his story thus demonstrates some of the difficulties of identifying possible ‘Irishness’. His namesake’s story provides another example whereby a child, and perhaps the mother, adopted a surname to signify paternity, although the child was not raised or necessarily officially acknowledged by his biological father.

**Shamrock Aborigines**

Let us now turn to the prominent Australian Aboriginal people who have identified as Aboriginal Irish. My web-site survey of some contemporary Aboriginal identities reveals several high achievers now choosing to publicly identify as Aboriginal-Irish. Artist Kevin Dolman, a member of ‘Artists in the Black’, described himself as ‘Aboriginal-Irish Australian’. His website states: ‘His mother is from the Eastern Arrernte people of central Australia, near Alice Springs and his father is an Irish immigrant from Derry in Northern Ireland’.

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77 Ireland, 2006.
79 Harney 1961.
Singer and songwriter Kev Carmody’s web biography boasts his family’s amalgamation of Irish and Murri oral history and storytelling traditions. Canberra-based Indigenous poet Jennifer Martiniello celebrates her mixed Chinese-Irish and Arrernte ancestry. Of her granddaughter, who excels at Irish dancing; she explained that she was ‘[b]orn to it, a natural’. The web site entry for athlete Patrick Johnson describes him as Aboriginal/Irish. After his Yarrabah-based mother died in a car accident when he was quite young, he was brought up on fishing boats by his determined Irish-born fisherman father. His fellow athlete Kyle van der Kuyp states his ambivalence about the singularity of ‘Aboriginal identity’:

In an awkward way it feels well I might be getting profiled because I’m an Aboriginal. If I was just a normal, you know, normal white Australian guy, you know, would I have a profile, probably not. I want people to know Kyle and not Kyle who’s Aboriginal Irish. No one asks me about Irish but I’m half and half.

Indigenous-Irish identity could also be deployed to explain injustice. It was used to make political sense of the plight of Dawn Casey, founding Director of the National Museum of Australia. Although a government-appointed review had sung her praises, the conservative Howard government and its appointed Museum Council labelled her as too sympathetic to the so-called ‘black armband’ view of Australian history. Indigenous leader Professor Mick Dodson blamed racism. As his angry farewell speech was reported:

An emotional Prof Dodson, who heads the Australian National University’s indigenous studies unit, referred to their shared Aboriginal-Irish heritage.

He described Ms Casey as an inclusive director who embodied the spirit of Aboriginal womanhood and centuries of Irish struggle.

‘Perhaps if you were white and had a dick and were of Anglo descent, you would have been treated with greater decency,’ Prof Dodson said.

‘But then again, the Anglos haven’t been about treating blacks or Irish with any decency.’

83 Martiniello 2003: 34.
86 Carroll et al 2003.
Prof Dodson’s tribute was choked by emotion and interrupted by his tears. 88

Indigenous historian Wayne Atkinson suggested numerous notable people not on my list, including artist John Moriarty, painter of the Qantas planes, the ‘father of reconciliation’ Pat Dodson, and the ‘mother of reconciliation’ Lois O’Donoghue, who was removed from her Aboriginal family while young. The self-identified category of ‘Aboriginal Irish’ in Australia is becoming a familiar one. Aboriginal-German, Aboriginal-Chinese and Aboriginal Japanese would be more likely to be used than those other British ethnicities. It is rare indeed to hear of anyone identifying as ‘Aboriginal English’, ‘Aboriginal Scots’ or ‘Aboriginal Welsh’. Yet in several regions of New South Wales during the first half of the nineteenth century, unions between Scots and Aborigines, and the English, were not uncommon. 89

When referring to ‘shamrock/Aboriginal’ activists, O’Farrell may well have been thinking of activists and unionists Jack and Joe McGinness and Gary Foley. The McGinnesses were prominent leaders in Darwin and nationally, arguing against restrictions on Aboriginal rights and citizenship. 90 With others, they helped propel the Gurindji’s famous walk-off from Wave Hill during the 1960s which argued for land rights and equal wages, popularly seen as the beginning of the modern land rights movement. 91 In June 1967, as President of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, Joe was also influential in the Referendum movement that fought for ‘citizenship’ to Aboriginal Australians. While pleased about the win, he was a great fighter for Aboriginal rights: Val and Vai McGinness proudly continued the fighting spirit that they identified as ‘Irish’. Val stated that his father was born on a ‘Dublin ship’ in New York Harbour. 92

Cheryl Buchanun, Lionel Fogarty and other activists were leading figures in the famous 1972 Tent Embassy established outside Canberra’s parliament house. It is difficult today to fully appreciate the courage of these individuals in opposing the state, for Aboriginal and mixed descent people had been subject to an extremely oppressive history of discriminatory legislation, violent punishment, incarceration and removal. According to some of their children, it was their ‘fighting Irish’ fathers that gave the ‘shamrock Aborigines’ the gall to fight the English, and authority in general, whatever the consequences. 93 Although a ‘Hibernophile’, in 1987, Burnum Burnum, the imposing Aboriginal man who

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91 Attwood 2003; Taffe 2005.


planted the Aboriginal flag on the white cliffs of Dover during the 1988 Australian Bicentenary Celebrations, sharply criticised the ‘shamrock Aborigines’ for the ‘Irish anger’ of their protest tactics.94 However, the Irish line is just as likely to be associated with survival strategies. The Indigenous story that Darug people married Irish to ensure smallpox immunity denotes historical agency that is congruent with the positive ‘survival’ theme of the 1988 Indigenous celebrations.

Irish as the good colonisers?

That many Indigenous Australians can claim some Irish ancestry does not necessarily prove the ‘good coloniser’ theory. As we have seen, there is little nineteenth century historical evidence available to back the contention that Irish or Irish Australians were historically more likely than other ethnic groups to either marry Aboriginal women or rear their own children to them. Indeed, in the absence of evidence, it might well be ‘blarney’.95 In Queensland, Irish men were probably less likely to marry Aboriginal women than Asian and Pacific Islanders were.

Due to the problems of categorising ‘the Irish’, the quest is not only difficult but also misguided. We could fall into the same traps as the 1980s feminist historians who sought to measure whether ‘white women’ were less likely to be racist and violent than white men. The chimera of the ‘good missus’, the redemptive, well-behaved coloniser has been debunked.96 Feminist and Indigenous historians have critiqued white women’s repressive and often misguided complicity in ‘rescuing’ the ‘colonised’.97 The prospect of any colonising group — whether analytically segregated on gender, class, ethnic or religious grounds — successfully maintaining the label of the ‘good colonisers’, therefore, seems like wishful thinking.

While the ruling English attract the blame for Australia’s colonising cruelty, the Irish themselves were hardly blameless. Like men from English and Scots backgrounds, Irishmen were among the police, squatters, pastoralists and others known for corrupt and murderous behaviours against Aborigines. The police charged with removing the mixed descent children in Australia included many Irish-born or second generation Irish Australians. Amongst the ‘good’, downtrodden Irish fathers and humanitarian heroes were also plenty of violent and corrupt police, rapacious frontiersmen, timber getters and boat crew, unscrupulous and murderous squatters and dubious missionaries.98

Nonetheless, the Irish have fared well in some Indigenous narratives, including those of the North Australian Gurindji. These strongly support the ‘good coloniser’ as an Irishman myth — at least when it comes to Ned Kelly and a notion

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95 Ronan 1954.
97 Haskins 2005; McGrath 1987; Paisley, Cole and Haskins 2005.
98 Seal 1996.
that his country ‘Island’ was a good place. Unlike the Englishman ‘Captain Cook’ who travelled in the ‘morally wrong’ direction and thus did things the wrong way in regard to Aboriginal law, Gurindji stories feature a mythologised Ned Kelly who travelled across their country from ‘Island’ in the right direction, along the right song-line and on the ‘good tracks’ – all according to the prescribed Indigenous law of the country.\textsuperscript{99} He would do good for them. The Gurindji must have heard about the legendary Irish Victorian, Ned Kelly, from white fellow stockmen or later unionists, some of whom were Irish or Aboriginal Irish such as Jack McGinness.\textsuperscript{100} In the Wave Hill walk-off, the Gurindji had to take on many authority figures: the managers, the British company led by Lord Vestey, the local managers and police. Ned Kelly may have inspired them to hold out in the bush with little food during the long 1960s strikes. The Gurindji did not believe people from afar arrived in their country accidentally, but rather, the earth, the land/dreaming had actually ‘called’ such people as Ned Kelly, author Frank Hardy and the radical Irish Australian trade unionists to travel there and assist in their fight for their land or country.\textsuperscript{101}

Australians of all backgrounds embraced the embittered Irish Australian plotline of the Kelly legend. In becoming the iconic outlaw and national hero for all Australians, Ned Kelly transcended Irishness, yet Irishness remains intrinsic to his story.\textsuperscript{102} In Australian popular culture and labour history, Irishness came to be seen as a class and ethnic protest against English moral, class, political and ‘race’ superiority. Irishness has thus been successfully mythologised not only as a historical victimisation epic but also as a subversive anti-colonial and working class ‘battler’ identity. Not only did mainstream Australian colonial identities self-consciously distinguish themselves from the British in England, they embraced such ‘Irish’ values.

Whilst the Irish in Australia may have become ‘assimilated’ and the Australian people perhaps absorbed or were assimilated by Irishness, this did not lead the Irish to lose their cultural identity entirely. Nor is it surprising that when ‘white’ Irish descendents got to write their own history, they chose to be the ‘good colonisers’. In the 1980s, O’Farrell’s project distinguished the Irish from other settler colonisers. He selected culturally desirable moral markers of Irish difference (and superiority to the English). Indeed, the purported qualities of Irish Australian men remain morally appealing today: egalitarian, less racist, and, arguably more ethical as they recognised both their Aboriginal female partners and their children. No mention of violence, coercion, rape or murder. It was as if they were involved in a more benign, inclusive colonialism – as if without sin.

100 Hardy 1968; McGinness 1991.  
102 Carey 2000; Seal 1996.
Shamrock Aborigines reconsidered

The Australian hobby of travelling vast distances to find appealing Irish origin narratives is no longer the exclusive preserve of settler and migration identity quests. As with other Australians, the ‘Aboriginal Irish’ select from a range of potential ancestors. In addition, like other Australians, Aboriginal Australians of mixed ancestry would seem to prefer to identify as Irish rather than English. However blurred by collective nostalgia, Shamrock Aboriginal declarations represent a renewed agency around identity claims. They also remind us that, from the earliest generations, many Irish Australians were also Aboriginal Australians and vice versa. Through marriage, children and family, the Irish in Australia not only ‘became white’; some also ‘became black’.

With each Indigenous/Irish Australian journey to connect with family histories of Old World dispossession, with each route connecting strands across the seas, aspects of settler colonialism’s narratives can be read anew. However ephemerally, these journeys evoke the possibility of reverse journeys from the ‘New World’ to the ‘Old’. Between hemispheres, and across complicated diasporas and older and newer histories of conflict and convergence, the diasporic kinship relations widen and complicate the genealogical charts.

When Aboriginal Irish venture back to Ireland, it is as though the origins journey is coming full circle: two old worlds, two deep pasts, converge in memory and imagination. Both the Irish and the Australian Aborigines have suffered histories of suffering, tragedy and resilience amidst deep troubles and mixed luck. They share a fighting spirit, a mischievous humour and an ability to create melodic and powerful stories. And they have more to share too. In 1999, an Aboriginal delegation travelled to Ireland on a trip to raise awareness of Indigenous issues. In the case of the Aboriginal Irish, subversive reputations, political strategies, and imaginative convergences and alliances flow between hemispheres. In 2002, Aboriginal leader Patrick Dodson visited Belfast on a reconciliation mission. As well as making statements in support of repatriation of Aboriginal human remains from European museums, he met up with a Protestant youth worker who grew up thinking that Catholics were ‘the enemy’. A former Jesuit priest once excommunicated from the church, Patrick Dodson had brought a message of national Reconciliation.103

While the Irish are known for their affection to land, their ‘love of Erin’, with at least 50,000 years on the continent, Aboriginal Australians can certainly outdo anyone when it comes to deep roots and longevity in one land. In Ireland, hunter-gatherers only arrived about 8000 BC. However, the Irish outstrip Aborigines in the centuries they fought against British colonisation and shocking oppression. While cultural loss for Aboriginal Australians has been great, after decades of being defined and identified by others, the ‘shamrock Aborigines’ have consequently been creating anti-colonial but very ‘Irish

Australian’ self-narratives. While Aboriginal-Irish identification may be deeply emotional, reflecting a desire for connection with close and distant kin, it serves another purpose too. By linking Indigenous Australia’s 210-year-old history of oppression with an internationally known history that is at least two and a half centuries longer than theirs is, they gain layers of rhetorical and analytical clout. Furthermore, due to its distance, being removed on an island far away on the other side of the world, it is a history arguably more digestible to the wider Australian community. In partially displacing other histories of shame, but also connecting them, the Irish story is less psychologically confronting than Australian colonialism at home – a history in which their ancestors were complicit.

The intimate ties that bind Ireland, Irish Australia, Aboriginal Australia and Indigeneity include paternity, maternity, family and kinship. Australians of Indigenous and Irish ancestry not only literally change the complexion of these ancestral adventures, they also complicate their chronologies and re-imagine canonical narratives of power. Exiled sons become exiled fathers. Furthermore, they continue to create multiple and informative historical stories that connect distant worlds. Shamrock Aborigines draw strength from the appealing fit of Ireland’s enduring histories of colonisation and displacement. In the latest travel itineraries, role reversals and fusions cannot be denied; the once colonised becomes the coloniser, the once Indigenous becomes the non-Indigenous.

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Defining disease, segregating race:
Sir Raphael Cilento, Aboriginal health and leprosy management in twentieth century Queensland

Meg Parsons

In Australia, as elsewhere, modern scientific studies of leprosy were firmly located within contemporary race-based and climatic medical theories, and were closely aligned to the discipline of tropical medicine. During the interwar period the race-based leprosy theories of doctors Cecil Cook and Sir Raphael Cilento directly informed leprosy management strategies in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. In the Queensland context, the emergence of these racially discriminatory medical theories helped solidify the Queensland government’s commitment to spatial segregation as its primary method of managing leprosy. Moreover these theories served to reinforce existing white perceptions about Aboriginal people and re-articulate the idea that Aboriginal ill health was an inescapable consequence of racial weaknesses. Sir Raphael Cilento, well known for his association with tropical medicine and social hygiene in Australia in the first half of the twentieth century, also played a pivotal role in the maintenance and alteration of the Queensland government’s Aboriginal leprosy management strategies during the 1930s. Historians have generally overlooked Cilento’s involvement in leprosy management, and perhaps more significantly failed to explore the operations of Fantome Island leprosarium, the institution Cilento helped establish, which was the longest running Aboriginal-only medical segregation facility in Queensland. I will attempt to redress this historical oversight in this article. Firstly I will provide a brief overview of leprosy management strategies in Queensland, then outline the medical theories of Cilento, and lastly chart the establishment and operations of the Aboriginal-only leprosarium on Fantome Island.

Leprosy management in colonial Queensland

In the late nineteenth century leprosy came to renewed prominence in European and colonial societies including Australia. Leprosy funds were established, international conferences assembled, and new legislation passed that enabled

governments to medically segregate leprosy patients in ‘leper’ colonies, lazarets or leprosariums. Yet there was not a dramatic increase in leprosy sufferers worldwide; rather a heightened consciousness about leprosy resulted in increased diagnosis of the disease. Leprosy management closely mirrored and merged with the colonial governance of racially coded populations. Both medical theories and popular discourses attributed the arrival and spread of leprosy to supposedly pathogenic non-white cultures, sometimes indigenous but usually diasporic non-whites. Misunderstandings of leprosy transmission coupled with racial coding led government authorities to justify and use the policy of segregation as the primary method to control leprosy.

In their pioneering 1970 article, Zachary Gussow and George S Tracy question whether the stigmatism of leprosy sufferers was a historical constant and culturally consistent phenomenon, which emerged as a ‘nature’ response to a disfiguring and incurable disease. They convincingly argue that the fear of leprosy was a cultural construct which arose in Western societies in the late nineteenth century as a consequence of colonial expansion. Leprosy was increasingly labelled a disease of non-white peoples (of colonial subjects), which tied in with mounting concerns about colonial rule, racial degeneration and the purity of the white race. As historians Alison Bashford and Maria Nugent have more recently observed, leprosy re-emerged into the collective consciousness of white societies that were already struggling with the consequences of colonialism and the ‘changing economies of race’. While leprosy was not wholly a colonial issue, the disease was nevertheless situated within the discourses of colonial medicine. The characterisation of leprosy as a non-white disease stimulated a whole array of efforts designed to prevent the spread of the disease to the ‘civilised’ world, including those introduced to Queensland during the late nineteenth century.

Doctors began to diagnose sporadic cases of leprosy in Queensland from the 1870s and 1880s. Although the disease initially appeared to be confined to the Chinese and Pacific Island migrant populations, the infection was soon found amongst the white population of Queensland causing widespread alarm. The

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5 The three terms -leper colony, lazaret and leprosarium - all refer to institutions designed for the medical segregation of leprosy sufferers. However the terms reflect different historical periods and institutions practices. The term leprosarium began to be used in the early to mid twentieth century, drew upon the term sanatorium and highlighted a shift in emphasis from punitive segregation to medical segregation. I will use the term leprosarium throughout the article to avoid confusion. Worboys 2000: 207–218. See also Bashford 2003.


7 Anderson 2006a, b; Bashford 2003; Bashford and Nugent 2002; Mawani 2003; Vaughan 1991.


9 Obregon 2002: 95.


11 Bashford and Nugent 2002: 106.

12 Bashford and Nugent 2002: 106.

13 Edmond 2006; Moran 2007; Bashford 2003.

14 This construction, of leprosy as a Chinese disease, was not unique to the Australian context and occurred in other white settler societies including Canada and New Zealand. Markus 1979; Saunders 1989; Evans 1989; Edmond 2006; Moran 2007.
Queensland government’s leprosy control strategies which emerged out of this alarm involved the identification and compulsory isolation of all leprosy patients (irrespective of race) on island-based segregation facilities. The first such facility, Dayman Island leprosarium, was established in Torres Strait in 1889 to house Chinese leprosy sufferers, and over the next 90 years various island sites were used for the purposes of compulsory isolation, detention and treatment of Queensland leprosy sufferers. From 1907 Queensland’s leprosy sufferers were sent to Peel Island, four kilometres off the coast of southern Queensland in Moreton Bay, to the state’s first (and only) multi-racial lazaret. In its first year in operation 71 patients were admitted to Peel Island leprosarium; 16 of whom were classified as white, the remainder were declared ‘coloured’. The establishment of a multi-racial medical institution in a state known for its racial segregation policies represented a radical departure from norms and government policies and is indicative of how leprosy as a disease was, in the words of historian Megan Vaughan, ‘often treated in a thoroughly exceptional’ manner. As she notes, leprosy management broke through ‘the usual colonial categorizations of difference’. This was clearly articulated in the compulsory isolation of all leprosy sufferers in Queensland, irrespective of their racial classification, which stood in marked contrast to the Queensland government’s venereal disease (VD) policies which required that all Aboriginal VD patients but only a small cohort of the white VD patient population (white female prostitutes in Brisbane) be placed in ‘lock hospital’ facilities.

Historian Suzanne Saunders has previously argued that the spatial segregation of Aboriginal leprosy sufferers in Northern Australia (Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland) represented an extension of the Aboriginal reserve system by which governments forcibly removed Aboriginal people from one location to another and sought to limit their movement. However, as the work of Jo Robertson has demonstrated, the creation of island-leprosariums in Queensland during the late nineteenth century was more closely aligned with the anti-Chinese movement, and there was no government or public discussion about leprosy with regards to the Indigenous population in this period. In this article I argue that it was not until the twentieth century that the Queensland government’s strategies of Aboriginal management dovetailed with its management of leprosy. This convergence – of the administrations of health and race – was most fully articulated in the operations of Fantome Island leprosarium, which was established in 1940 by Cilento to house Aboriginal leprosy sufferers.

15 Robertson 1999; Blake 1993.
16 Coloured was a generic term that was applied to Chinese, Pacific Islanders, Javanese, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islanders, but in this instance seems to imply non-white, non-Aboriginal. Of the 55 coloured patients admitted in 1907, 47 were Pacific Islanders, four Aborigines, three Chinese and one Indian. Blake 1993.
17 Vaughan 1991: 82.
18 Vaughan 1991: 82.
20 Robertson 1999.
Sir Raphael Cilento and the leprosy raids

Along with fellow doctors John Cumpston and John Elkington, Sir Raphael Cilento played a key role in the development of quarantine and tropical disease management policies in Australia during the interwar period. Cilento a medical practitioner, published author and career public servant undertook his medical training at the University of Adelaide and later at the London School of Tropical Medicine. His first major appointment was as Director of the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine (based in Townsville) in 1922, followed soon after by a secondment to Rabaul to be Director of Public Health for the Mandated Territory of New Guinea (1924–1928). In 1928 he succeeded Elkington as the Commonwealth Health Department’s Director of Tropical Hygiene and Chief Quarantine Officer in Brisbane. It was during his time as Director of Tropical Hygiene that Cilento became more closely involved in Aboriginal health and undertook research into Aboriginal health and leprosy incidence in the North Queensland Aboriginal population. Previously Cilento’s work – both bureaucratic and medical – had been primarily focused on tropical medicine, the health of whites living in Australia’s Tropical North, and the preventive medical doctrine of national hygiene.

Cilento’s interest in leprosy was longstanding, and during his time as Director of Tropical Hygiene and Chief Quarantine Officer for the Commonwealth Health Department (1931–1933) Cilento undertook research into Aboriginal leprosy infections in North Queensland. Most notably he took part in police-assisted leprosy raids in which Aboriginal people suspected of contact with confirmed leprosy sufferers were pursued, detained and subjected to compulsory medical examinations. The majority of the raids took place in 1931 when Cilento, accompanied by local police officers, ‘chased up’ Aboriginal leprosy contacts in North Queensland. The ‘sight of an ambulance’, he recalled, was enough ‘to send them [Aborigines] scuttling from any camp into the bush’. He and the police therefore made surprise visits to Aboriginal camps before daybreak to ensure camp residents could not run away and hide. He informed his wife: ‘We caught and examined most of those [Aborigines] we wanted but there [we]re several whom the police themselves ha[d] been hunting for months and they got away’. One Aboriginal woman ‘Polly’ who escaped capture, Cilento was annoyed to later learn, had been ‘sitting in the bush with her hands over her two kids mouths’ fearful of what the whites were planning to do to her and her children. Although Cilento expressed no empathy for Polly and her frightened children, one captured Aboriginal man described by Cilento as ‘a young and powerful aboriginal’ whose ‘tell tale heart fluttered the skin like a captive bird’,

21 Cilento 1920, 1925, 1944; Cilento and Lack 1959.
23 Aboriginal people typically deserted their homes at the first sign or rumour that whites, especially white police officers, were approaching, as they were understandably fearful of being removed to an Aboriginal reserve. Watson 1993: 78; Watson 1989: 4. See also Rosser 1985: 104.
24 Raphael Cilento to Phyllis Cilento, 25 September 1931, Diary letters, UQFL44, Box 11, Folder 44/21, Fryer Library, University of Queensland [hereafter FL].
inspired a measure of empathy in the doctor. He wrote: ‘I felt a curious little pang of pity and remorse just as I have always felt when I have seen natives charge into rifle fire or some other hopeless [act].’

In many ways the Cilento-led leprosy raids re-articulated the existing policies of the Queensland Chief Protector of Aborigines’ Office, which focused on the capture and removal of ‘troublesome’ Aborigines to government institutions such as Cherbourg and Palm Island. Cilento, like the police officers who accompanied him, were representatives of colonial authority and their actions (the surprise visits, forced medical examinations and removals), inspired no trust in the local Aboriginal people but rather were a source of constant fear. Moreover the leprosy patrols epitomised the close connection between the policing of race and health in interwar Australia and the ‘pathologising’ of Aboriginal sociality as a public health threat. Cilento argued the ‘native habits of changing their names repeatedly further disguises relationships already masked by the haphazard use of the terms “brother”, “father”, “cousin”, “uncle”, etc. [and] renders it utterly impossible to contemplate any system other than segregation’ for the Aboriginal population.

The North Queensland leprosy round-ups of 1931 paralleled those conducted by the Western Australian government in the North Kimberley region between 1934 and 1945. The Kimberley leprosy patrols, known colloquially as the ‘big round up’, typically consisted of a white police officer assisted by two or three Aboriginal trackers, occasionally accompanied by a white medical officer. The Western Australian leprosy campaign, Mary Ann Jebb observes, was conducted in a way that reinforced the pre-existing pattern of police raids on Aboriginal people rather than attempting to introduce medical practices as ‘a form of government assistance and protection for Aboriginal people’. In both Western Australia and Queensland the methods used during leprosy raids were similar to those used to capture criminals. A typical Western Australian leprosy raid, Jebb describes, involved the police officers surrounding an Aboriginal camp and at dawn, raiding the camp, firing shots in the air or at dogs to stop people fleeing, and all leprosy suspects were placed in chains. Accounts of the Kimberley raids are nearly identical to Cilento’s description of his North Queensland experiences.

However, the Kimberley patrols, unlike those of Queensland, came about because of economic and political considerations and were fully endorsed by the government. For example in northern Western Australia white station people took the drastic measure of sending their families away from the area

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25 Raphael Cilento to Phyllis Cilento, 25 September 1931, Diary letters, UQFL44, Box 11, Folder 44/21, FL.
28 Cilento, Series 1928/1, Control 690/8/106, Barcode 143806, National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA].
29 Jebb 2002: 137.
30 Jebb 2002: 139.
and threatening to abandon their pastoral leases if the government did not take action to control the Aboriginal leprosy problem. No similar action occurred in Queensland, despite public concern about Aboriginal leprosy cases. The Western Australian leprosy campaign therefore had an economic dimension notably absent from the Queensland context, which focused primarily on the medical impacts of leprosy. In accordance with economic considerations the Kimberley leprosy patrols focused on those Aboriginal people who were not part of the pastoral industry’s workforce and who moved around the bushlands of the northern ranges of the Kimberley. The Western Australian leprosy campaign, Jebb argues, placed considerable pressure on bush Aborigines ‘to settle down with a pastoral manager and conform to station life’.

The North Queensland leprosy round ups were different in that they were not officially sanctioned by either the Queensland State or Commonwealth governments. Cilento acknowledged in a letter to his wife: ‘Everything I did was unauthorised, most of it illegal and it went along a song’. The unofficial nature of the raids ensured they were a short-lived phenomenon. Cilento only records engaging in such raids during 1931, although he made another research trip to North Queensland in 1932. Moreover Cilento’s focus quickly shifted from the identification of Aboriginal ‘lepers’ to their policing, and from 1933 he began to campaign for the creation of a separate Aboriginal-only leprosarium in North Queensland. In 1933 he wrote an article in the *International Journal of Leprosy* in which he suggested an area be set aside for an Aboriginal ‘leprosarium and village community’, which would house, ‘not only bacteriologically positive cases … but [also] where suspects [could] be kept in confinement and dealt with more satisfactorily’.

A vigorous public debate about the diagnosis, treatment and control of leprosy occurred in Queensland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with considerable opposition to the spatial isolation of white leprosy sufferers. However by the 1930s medical segregation was the accepted method of leprosy management in the state. The racial imperatives of leprosy control, rather than diminishing as the twentieth century progressed, actually intensified in the interwar period as reflected in the works of doctors Sir Raphael Cilento and Cecil Cook. Cook’s leprosy studies in the 1920s positioned leprosy as a type of sexual transmitted infection caused by ‘racial mixing’ between white men and Aboriginal women and tied in with his concern about the regulation of miscegenation. In contrast Cilento emphasised racial susceptibility, negative

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33 Raphael Cilento to Phyllis Cilento, 25 September 1931, Diary letters, UQFL44, Box 11, Folder 44/21, FL.
34 Cilento, Series 1928/1, Control 4/5, Section 1, Barcode 141738, NAA.
35 Cilento 1933: 50.
37 Cook was later Chief Protector of Aborigines and Chief Medical Officer. Cook 1924, 1926; Bashford 2003; Parry 2003.
38 For analysis of Cook’s work see Anderson 2002; Bashford 2003; Parry 2003.
impacts of colonialism and poor nutrition as possible explanations for the high incidence of leprosy amongst the Aboriginal population. Despite their difference of opinion, the work of both doctors highlights the extent to which concerns about leprosy contagion intersected with societal fears about racial intermingling during this period. Robertson argues that it was precisely because leprosy refused to remain the disease of ‘others’ (other races or classes) that it became ‘increasingly important to maintain racial distinctions’. Moreover in the specific context of Australia’s tropical north, anxieties about the degeneration of the white race in tropical environments heightened existing unease about how best to control diseased and raced bodies.

In the Queensland context it was the work of Cilento, rather than that of Cook, which shaped Queensland government leprosy controls during the 1930s and 1940s in his role as the state’s Director-General of Health and Medical Services. Cilento was an avid supporter of the medical segregation of all leprosy patients irrespective of race. However he was particularly committed to the spatial isolation of Aboriginal leprosy patients and argued that ‘[t]heir complete dread of white society’s medicine’ made normal surgical and hospital techniques ‘utterly impossible’. The only acceptable solution, Cilento maintained, was the ‘complete segregation of all Aborigines diagnosed with leprosy’. Although patients on Peel Island lazaret were kept strictly segregated (white from non-white) Cilento declared these arrangements insufficient. Informed by ‘doomed race’ theories Cilento argued that a sole-Aboriginal leprosarium was the ‘best possible measure that could be introduced at the present time to safeguard the native population and to meet the present threat of their extinction’.

In accordance with his firm beliefs about racial segregation, Cilento made frequent references to the supposedly inherent racial differences between white and Aboriginal leprosy patients in his scientific publications and government reports of the 1930s. In his opinion Aboriginal leprosy patients were more difficult to treat, displayed notably immoral attitudes and behaviour, and relapsed more frequently than white patients. Although he did not directly criticise the multi-racial status of Peel Island lazaret, he nonetheless began to campaign for the creation of an Aboriginal-only lazaret in the state during the early 1930s. Even prior to receiving official approval for the Fantome Island leprosarium, Cilento already envisaged Peel Island leprosarium as a white-only institution. In 1938 he informed white staff members of their special responsibilities to white leprosy patients. He instructed them to make white patients feel ‘as comfortable as

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43 Cilento to Under Secretary, 27 October 1938, Series 4356, Item 717182, QSA; Also see Series 4356, Items 717218, 717219, 717220.
44 Cilento to Under Secretary, 27 October 1938, Series 4356, Item 717182, QSA; Cilento, Series A 1928/1, Item 690/8/106, NAA: 1–4.
45 Cilento 1939: 207–208.
46 Cilento 1933: 50.
possible' and authorised staff to purchase any additional ‘luxuries’ requested by white patients. Cilento recommended that patients’ relatives be encouraged to make frequent visits to the leprosarium in an effort to discourage ‘hopelessness’ among patients. In contrast he made no directives concerning the welfare of coloured patients. Instead he was firmly committed to their removal from the island and the establishment of an Aboriginal-only leprosarium on a remote North Queensland island. His plan eventually came into effect in January 1940 when Peel Island’s Aboriginal patients were transported via boat to the newly established Fantome Island leprosarium.

The work of Cook and Cilento, as well as the changing demographic composition of Peel Island lazaret, contributed to the re-conceptualisation of leprosy as an Aboriginal disease during the interwar period. However it is important to note that the significance of this disease construction was primarily confined to the political, scientific and bureaucratic spheres of white society, and the Queensland public did not appear overly concerned about the Aboriginal leprosy threat. This contrasted with the Queensland public’s heightened reaction to the threat of Chinese leprosy in the late nineteenth century. In the mid-twentieth century, however, most white Queenslanders felt sufficiently secure in their health and their communities continuing to employ Aboriginal workers on their farms and in their homes despite the apparently new threat of Aboriginal leprosy. Rather it was Queensland’s government officials, specifically Cilento but also the Minister of Health and Home Affairs (EM Hanlon) and Cilento’s successor as Director-General (Abraham Fryberg), who were pivotal in the creation of Aboriginal leprosy as a concern within state policy, a threat which in turn justified the government’s decision to further remove and constrain Aboriginal leprosy sufferers away from white society. These same officials were willing to concede in the post-war period (albeit with some reservations) that white leprosy sufferers did not require total isolation.

Following his appointment as Queensland’s Director-General of Health and Medical Services, Cilento began to further develop his plans for the establishment of an Aboriginal leprosarium. He personally selected the Palm Islands group as the locality for the new leprosarium. The chosen location at the northern tip of Fantome Island, six hours by boat from Townsville, was a suitably remote location for such a medical institution. Another Aboriginal-only medical segregation facility – Fantome Island Lock Hospital– operated at the other end of the island (1928–1945) and the state’s largest Aboriginal reserve – Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement – was located on a neighbouring island. The government’s decision to expand Fantome Island’s functions from an Aboriginal lock hospital for Aboriginal ‘venereal disease’ sufferers to include an Aboriginal leprosarium

47 Director General to Under Secretary, 19 July 1938, Series 8400, Item 279841, QSA; Cilento 1939: 207–208.
48 Cilento, ‘Visit to Peel Island Leprosarium’, 31 August 1931, Diary letters, UQFL44, Box 11, Folder 44/21, FL.
49 Moreover both the Queensland media and state parliamentarians were notably silent on the matter of Aboriginal leprosy, which indicates the issue was not considered especially important to the general public.
50 Cilento to Walker, 21 February 1935, Correspondence, UQFL/44, Box 4, Folder 11, FL.
came about through the concerted efforts of Cilento throughout the 1930s, which culminated in the Commonwealth government, through the auspices of its research funding organisation National Health and Medical Research Council, agreeing to fund the establishment of Fantome Island leprosarium.51

A problematic beginning – the establishment of Fantome Island leprosarium

The leprosarium officially opened on 10 January 1940, with the arrival of Aboriginal patients transported from Peel Island lazaret.52 Matron Avonia O’Brien, the senior nurse on Peel Island, accompanied the 49 Peel Island patients on their journey to Fantome Island and stayed on until the arrival of the Sisters of Our Lady Help of Christians (OLHC) in March 1940.53 Additional white staff consisted of FH Julian, long serving white administrator of Fantome Island lock hospital, who served as Superintendent of both the leprosarium and the lock hospital, and Dr Courtney, Palm Island’s Medical Officer, who was appointed visiting Medical Officer of the new institution. The leprosarium’s patient population steadily increased during the first six months of 1940 and by July totalled 74 patients (41 men and 33 women).

Fig 1. Newly established Fantome Island leprosarium looking north showing one section of patient housing, which was segregated by gender.

Source: Courtesy of Queensland State Archives, ID 279841.

From its inception, the Department of Public Health played a minor role in the day-to-day administration of Fantome Island leprosarium. In addition, and in marked contrast to his earlier involvement, Cilento played a limited role in the operations of Fantome Island leprosarium following its opening in 1940, and made no official visits to the institution. Instead the institution was unofficially managed by the Catholic Church, and Department of Native Affairs; an administrative decision primarily designed to reduce government expenditure on the institution. The Sisters of OLHC initially staffed the leprosarium, but were replaced in 1945 by the larger international order the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (FMM) who remained at the institution until its closure in 1973. Additional personnel and medical supervision was provided by officials from the Department of Native Affairs stationed on nearby Palm Island. This shift in responsibility from the administrative domain of medicine to that of mission and reserve resulted in Fantome Island leprosarium being markedly different from its institutional predecessor Peel Island lazaret.

The four OLHC Sisters arrived on Fantome Island two months after the official opening of the leprosarium (see Fig 2). There they encountered a totally incomplete institution; buildings were unfinished, medical supplies non-existent, and patient food provisions inadequate. During her time on Fantome, Matron O’Brien repeatedly complained to officials about the poor quality and quantity of food supplied to patients, the substandard accommodation and the general administration of the leprosarium. She ‘emphatically state[d]’ that the patients were ‘given supplies far below the regulations for daily rations’ and were suffering ill effects because of the inadequate diet. The former Peel Island patients, O’Brien remarked, were ‘all losing weight’ and ‘would die’ if ‘they were not better fed’. Despite O’Brien’s extensive experience on Peel Island, the leprosarium’s newly appointed government officials – Superintendent Julian, his assistant Mahony and Dr Courtney – rejected her complaints about food supplies as ‘pure fantasy’ and evidence of an ‘overwrought nervous system’.

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54 See Ann Mahony, Sydney, 1995, Fantome Island Collection, Oral History, FMM Archives.
56 See ‘Sister Monica Connolly: Memoir’, pp. 1–3, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives.
57 ‘Sister Monica Connolly: Memoir’, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives; O’Brien to Secretary, Department of Public Health, 6 April 1940, Series 8400, Item 279841, QSA.
58 O’Brien to EM Hanlon, Minister of Health and Home Affairs, 12 March 1940, and O’Brien to O’Shea, Secretary of Public Health, 21 January 1940, Series 8400, Item 279841, QSA.
59 Dr CA Courtney to Director of Native Affairs, 26 January 1940, Series 8400, Item 279841, QSA.
O’Brien’s concerns were legitimate and reflected the serious underfunding of the institution. Whereas the Queensland government spent approximately £1000 per annum on each white patient housed at Peel Island lazaret, the government allocated only £100 per Aboriginal patient housed at Fantome Island leprosarium (roughly one-tenth the amount spent on Peel Islanders). Superintendent Julian argued that the rations supplied to patients were adequate and paralleled those received by Fantome Island’s lock hospital patients. He maintained it was ‘cost prohibitive’ to purchase fruit and green vegetables for patients. Moreover Peel Island lazaret administrators, he argued, made ‘unnecessary expenditure’ on their patients and he would not make the same mistake. Fantome Island’s Aboriginal ‘lepers’ were not, according to Julian, entitled to the quality and quantity of food as Peel Island’s white leprosy patients. He declared ‘while every proper care must be given to the natives, there appears no necessity for supply on the scale at Peel’.

The government also sought to limit its expenditure on patient accommodation. The accommodation was constructed by Aboriginal labourers from neighbouring Palm Island settlement under the supervision of Julian and other government officials. Patients lived in small huts, which were approximately nine by 15 feet in size, and typically housed two to three people. Each consisted of a concrete floor, hardwood frame covered by ‘fibro-cement sheeting’ and a corrugated iron

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60 Watson 1993: 262; Ludlow 1989: 36; ‘Correspondence Relating to Staff of Lazarets’, 1905–1940, Series 8400, Item 18248, QSA.
61 Superintendent Julian to Dr Courtney, 24 January 1940, Series A/31756, QSA.
Photographs taken in 1940, soon after the leprosarium’s opening, show neat and tidy patient accommodation reminiscent of the native cottages on Palm Island settlement. However the huts were poorly designed and made from cheap, flimsy materials that quickly deteriorated in the tropical climate. After only ten years’ use Dr DW Johnson recommended that all buildings at the leprosarium ‘be gradually replaced by buildings of more suitable design and construction’.63

In 1950 the Director of Native Affairs Cornelius O’Leary (1942–1963) acknowledged the accommodation on Fantome Island was of substandard quality and was rapidly deteriorating in the tropical climate. He declared that his department had allocated funds to rebuild the leprosarium, however ‘no competent labour could be induced to undertake the work’ and he was wary of employing Aboriginal labourers.64 Rather than acknowledging the government’s culpability for the leprosarium’s inadequate patient accommodation (namely the faulty designs and inappropriate building materials used by his department) O’Leary chose to blame the Aboriginal labourers who constructed the buildings.65 Similarly another government official remarked that the ‘bad repair’ of some huts was ‘no doubt, aided by a certain amount of careless use by the patients’.66 In 1953 Peel Island’s Medical Superintendent Dr Gabriel observed that the housing on Fantome Island was ‘far superior’ to that provided to Aboriginal inmates on neighbouring Palm Island, an indication of the terrible living conditions Palm Islanders were forced to endure.67 The government made no effort to improve accommodation on either Fantome or Palm Islands despite ongoing criticism.

Not surprisingly, the institution’s mortality was high during its first decade in operation. In its first year the leprosarium recorded a mortality rate of 20 per cent (202 per thousand). Although a slight decline was recorded in subsequent years, the leprosarium’s death rate remained over 10 per cent (100 per thousand) throughout the 1940s.68 Of the 49 Peel Island patients who arrived at the leprosarium in January 1940, the majority died within five years of arriving at Fantome Island, not from leprosy, but from tuberculosis. Tuberculosis (TB), a disease associated with overcrowding, poor living

62 ‘MH Gabriel, Acting Medical Superintendent Peel Island, Report on Visit to Fantome Island – April 1953’, 8 May 1953, Series 505, Item 505017, QSA.
64 Director of Native Affairs to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 11 April 1950, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
65 Director of Native Affairs to Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, 11 April 1950, SRS 505, 3A/157, Box 464, QSA.
66 ‘MH Gabriel, Acting Medical Superintendent Peel Island, Report on Visit to Fantome Island – April 1953’, 8 May 1953, Series 505, Item 505017, QSA.
67 ‘MH Gabriel, Acting Medical Superintendent Peel Island, Report on Visit to Fantome Island – April 1953’, 8 May 1953, Series 505, Item 505017, QSA.
68 ‘Index: Patient names and death dates’, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives.
conditions, and nutritional deficiencies, was prevalent at the institution throughout the 1940s, with the overcrowded patient accommodation facilitating the spread of the disease.69

**Discipline and control**

The Sisters of Fantome Island sought to establish their leprosarium as a therapeutic space, a place of both physical and spiritual reform, where Catholicism was the guiding principle. In many ways the lives of Fantome Island’s leprosy sufferers paralleled the lives of Filipino leprosy sufferers on Culion Island several decades prior. Warwick Anderson maintains that the Culion leprosarium, operated by the American colonial government, was a ‘laboratory of therapeutics and citizenship’ where ‘the production of the individual civic subject’ served as a form of modern evangelism based on the ‘gospel of hygiene’ and the wider process of medicalisation.70 However on Fantome Island the doctrines of modern medicine, hygienic reform, and Christianity fused to create a space that was simultaneously a Catholic mission, an up-to-date medical institution, and a government-run Aboriginal reserve.

Under the Department of Public Health’s administration, Peel Island’s Aboriginal and other ‘coloured’ leprosy patients frequently wrote letters of complaint to government officials and had their complaints investigated.71 In contrast, Fantome Island’s Aboriginal lock hospital and leprosarium patients were largely unable to protest their confinement through the avenue of letter writing, with Department of Native Affairs staff censuring and restricting patient mail, and disciplining complainants. In the context of Peel Island lazaret, Bashford and Nugent suggest that Aboriginal patients’ ability to protest their detention and appeal for better living condition was partly tied to the fact that they were housed alongside white leprosy sufferers.72 They argue that:

> Avenues of complaint, of written protest, the sense of right of access to the highest judicial bodies, seems to have been more possible from the subject position of ‘leper’ than from the subject position of ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘half-caste’ regulated by the ‘normal’ systems of race management in interwar Australia, partly because the space and experience of isolation–as–leper was shared with whites.73

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In contrast on Fantome Island, I argue and will demonstrate, Aboriginal leprosy patients’ status as ‘lepers’ was a subordinate classification to that of ‘Aboriginal’, and the avenues of protest, previously available on Peel Island, were unavailable to those on Fantome Island.74

Fantome Island leprosy patients were expected to work diligently between their medical treatments as a method to achieve both physical and spiritual healthiness. Unlike on Peel Island where patients did not work, on Fantome Island all patients ‘who were fit to work’ were required to do so.75 Patients ‘working minimum hours were unpaid’ for their work, although those undertaking ‘essential services and special work were paid’ a small allowance by the Department of Native Affairs.76 Patients performed a range of general labouring, domestic and sanitation tasks around the leprosarium, including cooking and caring for other patients (see Fig 3). The work system was first instituted by Mother Peter, the OLHC mission leader, in 1940, who on arriving on Fantome Island deemed the ‘moral state’ of patients ‘one of idleness’ which left ‘much to be desired’ and declared the entire leprosarium ‘very dirty’.77 A month later Mother Peter was pleased to report a ‘marked improvement’ in the patients’ moral state, brought about because of the allocation of ‘duties’ to those able to work, which kept ‘them busy for the greater part of the mornings’ and ensured the leprosarium was gradually ‘becoming cleaner’.78 However she noted that ‘our poor people’ were not ‘energetic’ workers and needed ‘constant encouragement’ and supervision to ensure they completed tasks and did not ‘fall back’ into idle ways.79 In advocating such a system of supervised work the Sisters were drawing on missionary precepts as well as the standard operating practice of Queensland’s various Aboriginal missions and government-run reserves. Work was viewed as a fundamental part of both government and missionary efforts to reform and civilise Aborigines, and can be located within a wider reformative tradition, which included women’s reformatories, asylums, prisons, workhouses and industrial schools.80

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75 George Sturges Superintendent, Palm Island Settlement to Deputy Director of Native Affairs, 22 February 1951, Series 505, Item 505020, QSA; Watson 1993: 196.
76 George Sturges Superintendent, Palm Island Settlement to Deputy Director of Native Affairs, 22 February 1951, Series 505, Item 505020, QSA.
77 ‘Mother Superior: Monthly Report of Fantome Island leprosarium, March 1940’, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives.
78 ‘Mother Superior: Monthly Report of Fantome Island leprosarium, April 1940’, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives.
79 ‘Mother Superior: Monthly Report of Fantome Island leprosarium, April 1940’, ‘Mother Superior: Monthly Report of Fantome Island leprosarium, September 1942’, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives; George Sturges Superintendent, Palm Island Settlement to Deputy Director of Native Affairs, 22 February 1951, Series 505, Item 505020, QSA.
At the Fantome Island leprosarium white officials, like their compatriots on Cherbourg and Palm Island settlements, declared Aboriginal immorality a source of constant concern. The OLHC Sisters affirmed the lack of ‘sexual discrimination or separation’ between patients as the most pressing issue at the leprosarium, rather than the chronic food shortages or deficient accommodation.82 Mother Peter reported her first impressions of Fantome Island leprosarium in a letter to Bishop Ryan:

> We find the moral condition of our poor people in a deplorable state. The building accommodation is temporarily inadequate. The sexes are intermixed. There is much to be desired in cleanliness and so on. … Until this is in order the medical treatment peculiar to leprosy would be of little use.83

Officials attempted to rectify this problem by building two separate accommodation compounds, divided by gender and marriage status (see Fig 1). Single females lived in the female compound, while married women lived with their husbands in the male compound, which also accommodated single men. However in the absence of physical barriers and strict policing to keep the sexes apart, as in the dormitories of Cherbourg settlement, Fantome Island’s patients were largely free to interact with members of the opposite sex. One FMM Sister

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81 This photograph and all others in this article can be found in the records of the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People held at the Queensland State Archives. Due to the department’s access requirements, I cannot name the patient in the photograph.

82 ‘Sister Monica Connolly: Memoir’, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives.

83 Sister M Peter to Bishop H Ryan, 6 March 1940, cited by Maguire 1991: 142.
wrote in dismay after only six months on Fantome Island in 1945: ‘Immorality reigns at the leprosarium. It is like a wound, an evil which we try to remedy.’\textsuperscript{84} Similarly Cilento noted that ‘immorality’ (pre-marital sexual relations) was widespread on Fantome Island and ‘admit[ed] that it is very difficult indeed to prevent intercourse between the natives’.\textsuperscript{85} Prior to 1947 Fantome Island leprosy patients were not permitted to marry because of concerns about disease transmission to infants.\textsuperscript{86} However the government reconsidered its policies after persistent campaigning from Catholic and Anglican Church officials.\textsuperscript{87} Cilento concluded that when ‘pregnancy results it is better that it should be a legitimate pregnancy than an illegitimate one’.\textsuperscript{88}

No infants born at the Fantome Island leprosarium were allowed to stay at the institution because of fears of infection. In 1944 Cilento declared that the likelihood of infection made the detention of children ‘criminally negligent in every sense’.\textsuperscript{89} Thus newborn infants were quickly removed from the leprosarium to the Palm Island settlement and placed in dormitories or with Aboriginal foster parents. When a child was born on Fantome Island a nun would immediately take the infant and place it in basket, and hold the basket aloft so the mother and father could catch a glimpse of their child before it was taken away by boat. No physical contact between parents and children was allowed; as a former patient recalls ‘I couldn’t touch my child. The boat … didn’t wait for anything.’\textsuperscript{90} However the Sisters endeavoured to work around the restrictions to allow mothers to see their infants. Sister Angela recalled:

There was one woman who came in who was pregnant and had a husband and her husband was allowed to come over and stay at the lock [hospital] … he was allowed to take the baby home [once it was born]. He brought it [the baby] into the room a couple of times … but she [the mother] wasn’t allowed to touch it.\textsuperscript{91}

Similarly in 1949 Dr DW Johnson approved one female patient’s request to allow her ten-year-old son (whom she had not seen since birth) to visit the leprosarium. Johnson permitted the boy to ‘come to the beach and talk to [his mother] at Christmas and at Easter’ because the woman was now ‘returning negative smears’.\textsuperscript{92}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{85} Cilento to Sister M Peter, 7 October 1944, Series 4356, Item 717238, QSA; Also see Series 4356, Items 717239, 71740, 71741, QSA.
\bibitem{86} Cilento to Acting Superintendent, Fantome Island Lock Hospital and Lazaret, 16 July 1941, Series 505, Item 505021, QSA.
\bibitem{88} Cilento to Sister M Peter, 7 October 1944, Series 4356, Item 717238, QSA.
\bibitem{89} Cilento to Sister M Peter, 7 October 1944, Series 4356, Item 717238, QSA.
\bibitem{91} Sister M Angela, Interviewed by Carey, 7 July 1997, cited by Carey 1998: 258.
\bibitem{92} ‘DW Johnson Report on Lazaret, Fantome Island’, 14 July 1950, Series 505, Item 504998, QSA.
\end{thebibliography}
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from their parents paralleled the government’s Aboriginal dormitory policies; however, unlike the general Aboriginal child-removal policies, on Fantome Island the primary logic was medical rather than socio-cultural and aimed to protect children from leprosy infection. Another former leprosarium patient recalls travelling to Palm Island at low tide and being allowed to stand at the foot of the jetty and talk to his son (who stood on the jetty above his head). He recounts: ‘[o]nce I reached out and touched him. People jumped at me from all roads.93

The removal of disease-free children from their leprous parents was the standard procedure at leprosariums both in Australia and worldwide.94 For example at the Channel Island leprosarium (Northern Territory) infants were removed from their mothers at birth and sent to dormitory accommodation in Darwin. While children born at Culion Island leprosarium were placed in the institution’s nursery until the age of two, after which time they were sent to Manila and placed in an orphanage or with adoptive parents.95 However at the Lau si Momo leprosy village, a joint colonial government-mission initiative in the Dutch East Indies, infants and children were allowed to stay with their leprosy infected parents because officials believed that mother’s milk improved children’s chances of survival.96

Like Palm Island’s Settlement Matron, the nuns of Fantome Island took it on themselves to attempt to discipline and reform Aboriginal females. The leprosarium hospital was ‘occasionally used’ by the Sisters ‘as a jail for women patients who needed punishment of some kind’. The nuns, patients complained, restrained individual women patients ‘who caused trouble in the compound by reason of [their] immorality’.97 The Sisters maintained that at times physical restraints were ‘necessary for the protection’ of the women themselves and ‘in the interests of law and order [at] the institution’. Although the female patients who suffered this punishment condemned the nuns’ behaviour, Dr Gabriel (Peel Island’s Medical Superintendent) considered ‘the action of the nuns … reasonable’ and argued the ‘nuns were very lenient with the patients’.98

At Fantome Island leprosarium the physical control of those women deemed ‘immoral’ suggests that the Sisters were attempting to inculcate modesty and abstinence in Aboriginal females by emphasising ideas of sin and guilt, especially in regards to sexual matters. Bain Attwood has similarly observed that on Ramahyuck, an Aboriginal mission station established by Moravian

93 Herbert Paddy Tanna recounted being separated from his son while a patient at Fantome Island to journalist Alan Gill. See ‘The island of sun and solace’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 February 1977.
97 ‘MH Gabriel, Acting Medical Superintendent Peel Island, Report on Visit to Fantome Island – April 1953’, 8 May 1953, Series 505, Item 505020, QSA; also see Series 505, Item 505021.
98 ‘MH Gabriel, Acting Medical Superintendent Peel Island, Report on Visit to Fantome Island – April 1953’, 8 May 1953, Series 505, Item 505020, QSA.
missionaries in eastern Victoria in 1863, missionaries attempted to transform the ‘nature of Aboriginal control of their bodily selves’ through Christian teachings, which aligned sex with sin.  

Along with the nuns’ use of the hospital as a female detention ward, other disciplinary measures were implemented on Fantome Island during the mid-1940s. A native police force was employed from 1946 under the direction of Palm Island’s Superintendent GR Roberts. In addition two gaol cells were constructed on the island, ‘one for female and the other for male offenders’. Roberts argued that the presence of a gaol at the leprosarium would have a ‘beneficial influence on the discipline of the patients’. At the present time, he reasoned, there was ‘no special place for the incarceration of natives guilty of an offence’ and thus there was ‘no means [to] dete[r]fenders or in the case of a serious crime, no special place in which to hold them in custody’. O’Leary, Director of Native Affairs, agreed with Roberts’ penal proposal and ‘strongly recommend[ed] the construction of concrete or strong wooded cell[s]’ at the leprosarium. O’Leary maintained that the cells could be used for a range of purposes including the detention of ‘one male patient’ at the facility who was, he stated, ‘slightly mental’ and ‘may have to be detained should his conduct deter[ior]ate.’ The leprosarium’s gaol cells, native police force, and hospital/detention ward indicate the crossover of medical and punitive rationales. In many ways the implementation of punitive measures at the leprosarium is unsurprising considering that nearby Palm Island was an Aboriginal penal settlement and that harsh disciplinary measures had previously been used by lock hospital staff. However, the harsh disciplinary practices contrasted with the Sisters’ generally up to date and humane medical treatment of patients.

**Medical and nursing care**

The leprosarium was equipped with a six-roomed hospital building (see Figs 4 and 5), which contained a doctor’s room, laboratory, dispensary, dental unit, verandah, hospital ward, and adjoining kitchen (located in a separate building). While the hospital housed the OLHC Sisters temporarily, the patients were treated outside or in their huts. Two dressing stations, where Sisters dressed patients’ wounds, were located in each of the patient compounds. Each dressing station was also provided with a small dispensary that contained frequently used drugs, in particular chaulmoogra oil. OLHC Sister Catherine recalls:

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100 GR Roberts, Acting Superintendent Palm Island, to Director of Native Affairs, 20 February 1946, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
101 GR Roberts, Acting Superintendent Palm Island, to Director of Native Affairs, 20 February 1946, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
102 GR Roberts, Acting Superintendent Palm Island, to Director of Native Affairs, 20 February 1946, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
Each day the patients’ sores were cleansed and dressed. In bad cases, they had to be done twice daily. Medicine was given for leprosy and also for any other complaint the patient might have.

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Fig 4. Leprosarium hospital showing in-patient treatment room, 1940.

Source: Courtesy of Queensland State Archives, ID 279841.

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Fantome Island’s leprosy patients, like those on Peel Island, were required to undergo regular smears to test for the presence of the leprosy bacterium. Aboriginal leprosy suspects detained on Palm Island were also subjected to this regime of monthly smear tests.\textsuperscript{106} Each patient was required to undergo smear testing once a month, which involved blood samples being collected from the

\textsuperscript{106} Dr Short, Palm Island Medical Officer to Director of Native Affairs, 7 December 1947, Series 505, Item 505317, QSA.
eyebrow, cheek, ear lobe and nostril. The process of smear collection caused patients considerable discomfort and many patients experienced excessive bleeding. A leprosy suspect detained at Palm Island Aboriginal Settlement recounts:

The doctor then put an instrument which looked like a needle to me up my left nostril. It hurt me when he put that up my nostril. I threw my head back a little bit when the needle hurt me and cried out with the pain. When I cried out the doctor slapped me across the right cheek with his open hand. It was a hard slap. At the same time he put the instrument further up [my] nostril and this caused it to bleed a lot, some of it got on my dress … I nearly fainted…

However FMM Sisters and the Department of Health and Home Affairs attempted to downplay the pain and discomfort patients endured. After collecting the smears, the Sisters transferred them onto slides, and examined the slides under the microscope in the leprosarium laboratory (see Fig 5). The slides were then sent on to the government laboratory in Brisbane for secondary analysis.

Throughout the 1940s Fantome Island’s leprosy patients required 24 consecutive negative smear results (taken at monthly intervals) before they were eligible for discharge to Palm Island settlement, and in the 1950s, following the introduction of sulphone-based drugs, the number was reduced to 12 negative smears. Similarly on Peel Island leprosarium patient discharge requirements declined due to improved medical treatments in the 1950s. Whereas in 1950 white patients required 12 consecutive negative smears, by 1958 only three negative smears were required before they could be discharged. However, all discharged patients, white and Aboriginal alike, were obliged to submit to regular medical examinations (including smear tests) for several years after their discharge.

Chaulmoogra oil was the standard treatment for leprosy worldwide and was used on both Peel and Fantome Islands. On Fantome, the Sisters recorded that many patients suffered severe reactions (including nausea and blindness) to the oil. In August 1948 the antibiotic Promin was given to Fantome Island’s leprosy patients for the first time. Peel Island’s patients were treated with the sulphone-

107 ‘Report of Stipendiary Magistrate AM Taylor, Court House Ayr’, 26 June 1944, Series 505, Item 505305, QSA.
108 ‘Statement of Leprosy Patient’, 21 June 1944, Series 505, Item 505312, QSA. In accordance to the requirements of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs I do not identify any Aboriginal person detailed in the QSA files by name and use a pseudonym where applicable.
109 See entire folder entitled ‘Palm Island – Submission of Smears’, Series 505, Item 505317, QSA.
110 Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, to Director of Native Affairs, 5 September 1958, Series 4356, Item 717235, QSA.
111 During the 1930s several discharged Aboriginal leprosy patients were sent from Peel Island to Cherbourg settlement, and Cherbourg hospital staff were required to take regular smears from the patients. See the entire folder Series 1890, Item 336204, QSA.
113 Watson 1993: 264.
based drug from January 1947. The new drugs quickly arrested the disease in most patients. However, like chaulmoogra oil, they also produced reactions including nausea, fever, dizziness and angioedema (swelling). In 1951 the Department of Native Affairs reported that only ten per cent of Fantome Island leprosy patients were able to receive sulphone treatments ‘without any apparent reaction or discomfort’, while 90 per cent suffered side effects. Treatment dosages were largely experimental, Director of Native Affairs Cornelius O’Leary explained, and there were few methods available to control these reactions. Despite the severe reactions many Fantome Island patients seemed to respond to sulphone drugs and during the 1950s patient mortality rates gradually declined, while patient discharge numbers steadily increased. Between 1950 and 1955 71 patients were discharged from Fantome, with 19 discharged in 1954 alone; prior to the introduction of sulphone drugs discharges had averaged just one patient per year.

While the Sisters welcomed the introduction of more effective sulphone-based drug treatments from 1948, their enthusiasm for the new drugs was tempered by their concerns about patients’ diminishing belief in Christianity. One FMM Sister was alarmed to report that improving health and lowering mortality rates at the leprosarium was having a negative effect on patients’ behaviour, most notably diminishing church attendance. From her perspective this was evidence of moral ill health, comparable to the physical ill health caused by leprosy. From the standpoint of the OLHC and FMM missions, questions of health and morality were inexorably related to religious belief. Moreover the purpose of the Sisters’ work was not only to treat patients’ physical conditions but also their spiritual needs.

Movement to close Fantome Island

In the 1950s a dramatic increase in the number of patients eligible for discharge occurred as a result of new drug therapies. However the Department of Native Affairs was reluctant to discharge former leprosy patients to their home districts. Instead the department declared that all former ‘lepers’ would be sent to Palm Island settlement where they could be appropriately supervised. The department’s decision to send former patients to Palm Island paralleled the

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118 Index: Patient names and death dates, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives.
119 M Chrysanthe Provincial Journal, 22 August 1953, Index: Patient names and death dates, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives.
120 M Chrysanthe Provincial Journal, 22 August 1953, Index: Patient names and death dates, Fantome Island Collection, Box D.2, FMM Archives. See also Kipp 1994: 165–178.
121 MH Gabriel, Acting Medical Superintendent Peel Island, Report on Visit to Fantome Island – April 1953, 8 May 1953, Series 505, Item 505017, QSA.
department’s treatment of Fantome Island’s discharged VD patients a decade earlier, and brings us once again to question the meaning and effect of detention in the context of Fantome Island. Detention on Fantome Island, both at the lock hospital and the leprosarium, was a result of convergent rationales of segregation (punitive, quarantine, therapeutic and racial), with the rationale of racial segregation given primary importance by the Queensland government for most of the twentieth century.

Current medical knowledge and practices were given little consideration by government officials who debated the future of Fantome Island leprosarium during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Dr Gabriel, former Medical Superintendent of Peel Island lazaret, declared that transferring Aboriginal patients to the leprosy ward at Brisbane’s Princess Alexandra Hospital would be ‘disastrous’ because they would cause infinite disciplinary ‘problems’ and unnerve white patients. Instead Gabriel called for the establishment of an Aboriginal-only leprosy ward on Palm Island settlement where ‘troublesome’ Aboriginal leprosy patients could be detained away from the white population; echoing the sentiments of Cilento some 30 years later. The Queensland Cabinet eventually approved the construction of such facility – a six-bed isolation ward – on Palm Island. The new ward was to be funded and managed by the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (as the Department of Native Affairs was known from 1965) as opposed to the Department of Health. This transfer of control from the Department of Health to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs formalised the already close connection between the government’s management of leprosy and its management of Indigenous peoples.

The government’s decision encountered widespread opposition from the FMM Sisters, Palm Island settlement staff, Fantome’s six remaining leprosy patients and the Medical Superintendent of Townsville Hospital (Dr David Bowler). Dr Bowler argued that the isolation ward was not in line with current leprosy management procedures which favoured rehabilitative and community treatment options. He observed that leprosy was now primarily ‘a social problem, not a medical one’, and the government needed to work towards overcoming people’s ‘emotional and groundless’ fears of the disease. The leprosarium patients, officials reported, expressed genuine alarm at the prospect of being sent to Palm Island where they believed ‘they would be locked up and isolated’.

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122 Dr Gabriel Memorandum to Director-General of Health and Medical Services, 21 February 1973, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
123 Director-General of Health and Medical Services to Reverend Mother, Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, 7 December 1970, ‘Report of David P Bowler Medical Superintendent Townsville Hospital into Fantome Island Leprosarium’, 18 January 1971, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
124 Sister Jermaine Bellmare to Mr Killoran, 25 August 1970, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
125 ‘Report of David P Bowler Medical Superintendent Townsville Hospital into Fantome Island Leprosarium’, 18 January 1971, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
126 ‘Report of David P Bowler Medical Superintendent Townsville Hospital into Fantome Island Leprosarium’, 18 January 1971, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.
noted the financial savings it would make by housing patients on Palm Island.\textsuperscript{127} The six Aboriginal leprosy patients (all male) housed at the specially built isolation ward at Palm Island Hospital, in contrast to the white leprosy patients housed at Princess Alexandra Hospital, were prohibited from interacting with the rest of the Aboriginal reserve population and remained confined to the ward. Evidently the ‘politics of race’ continued to underwrite the policy and practice of public health in Queensland during the 1970s, with the isolation of Aboriginal leprosy sufferers within an Aboriginal reserve reminiscent of the government’s initial response to Aboriginal VD sufferers in the 1910s.\textsuperscript{128}

**Conclusion**

The decision to remove and detain Aboriginal leprosy patients in an isolation ward on an Aboriginal reserve represents a continuation of the government’s longstanding leprosy controls, first introduced by the Queensland government almost a century earlier and reinforced by the work of Cilento and Cook in the interwar period. Although the government modified its leprosy management strategies following the advent of sulphone-based drugs, officials remained unwilling to completely abandon the policy of medical segregation with regards to Aboriginal patients. However, the enforced isolation of Aboriginal leprosy sufferers was the typical rather than exceptional government policy in the specific context of Northern Australia, and Aboriginal-only leprosarium continued to operate in both Western Australia and the Northern Territory until the 1980s.\textsuperscript{129} As Parry has noted, the governments of Northern Australia retained their policies of isolating Aboriginal leprosy patients, despite mounting international and local criticism, for racial rather than medical reasons.\textsuperscript{130} In this way issues of race, as Bashford has previously observed, pervaded the management of leprosy throughout Australia.\textsuperscript{131}

Aboriginal leprosy patients, in spite of decreasing infection rates and improvement of treatment outcomes, continued to be depicted and treated by officials as potentially dangerous and as possible sources of contagion. Aboriginal disease, more generally, continued to be framed in problematic terms by medical officials. The framing of disease, as Rosenberg and Golden have argued, dictates how a society will respond to a disease and affects medical knowledge, treatment options, medical care, public policy, and the behaviour of those diagnosed with the disease.\textsuperscript{132} In the context of twentieth-century Queensland, the framing of leprosy as a disease of non-whites ensured that spatial segregation remained the pre-eminent treatment option for much of the century. Even when medical

\textsuperscript{127} Acting Health Officer to Director-General of Health and Medical Services, 7 September 1973, Series 505, Item 505023, QSA.

\textsuperscript{128} Stoler 1995: 113.

\textsuperscript{129} Saunders 1990: 168–181.

\textsuperscript{130} Parry 2003: 17.

\textsuperscript{131} Bashford 2003: 91.

\textsuperscript{132} Rosenberg and Golden 1991: xiii.
knowledge disproved prior theories about leprosy, including the link between race and disease susceptibility, support for the medical segregation of Aboriginal leprosy sufferers remained largely undiminished. This related to the persistence of white community and governmental support for the racial segregation of Aboriginal and white communities. However, it is important to recognise that Fantome Island leprosarium and the overarching leprosy management policies of the Queensland government did not arise from an uncomplicated or consistent rationale (that is, racial segregation). Rather, as Mark Cherry has shown, particular medical social realities emerged from a range of moral and epistemological assumptions. Medicine, as I have sought to demonstrate, is not a neutral discipline, because to ‘describe a human condition, … as a disease to be treated medically, … is to advance moral and conceptual judgements that fashion licit and illicit health care practices’. Thus the ‘social ontology of morality and medicine’ are inextricably intertwined.133

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**Their Darkest Hour:** the films and photographs of William Grayden and the history of the ‘Warburton Range controversy’ of 1957

Pamela Faye McGrath and David Brooks

This paper discusses the use of documentary films and photographs of Aboriginal people from the Ngaanyatjarra region of Western Australia in the late 1950s during a heated public debate about remote Aboriginal health and welfare. The recruitment of images of people in situations of physical distress to illustrate arguments about political and bureaucratic neglect was controversial, sparking accusations of propaganda and disagreement about the norms of Aboriginal well-being. Some of the images produced, most notably those of Western Australian politician William Grayden, had a significant impact on audiences at the time. Grayden’s film, shown in a Perth cinema under the title *Their Darkest Hour* and sometimes referred to as *Manslaughter*, is celebrated in recent histories of Aboriginal activism and extracts from it have been used by a new generation of activist filmmakers and artists. The perspectives of the Aboriginal people who appear in Grayden’s images are, however, a notable absence in these accounts. When considered alongside other historical sources, local Aboriginal voices reveal a significant visual distortion of the quality of people’s lives and the substance of their histories as they are remembered today.

The following research draws on a range of historical and ethnographic information including patrol officer field reports, government correspondence, and interviews with local Aboriginal people and other participants in these events. The perspectives of many Ngaanyatjarra people – a few of whom appear in Grayden’s film and most of whom also have close family who appear in it – were gathered in 2008 and 2009 during a ‘re-documentation’ project of historical films and photographs conducted by Pamela McGrath.1 Supporting ethnographic observations and opinion offered by David Brooks has been gathered during his time working as an anthropologist for Ngaanyatjarra Council, a career that spans over two decades.2 We begin with a brief account of the ‘Warburton controversy’ of 50 years ago, providing a description of *Their Darkest Hour* and its circulation and reception. We then analyse what the film and associated texts suggested about the quality of remote Aboriginal lives, discuss how they are received and valued by *yarnangu*3 families today, and examine why their ongoing use by others is at times highly problematic.

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1 This fieldwork was conducted as part of Pamela McGrath’s doctoral thesis, ‘Hard looking: an historical ethnography of the filming and photography of Aboriginal families in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, Western Australia’.
2 David Brooks is currently completing a doctoral thesis on the changing social organisation of Ngaanyatjarra people.
3 Ngaanyatjarra term for Aboriginal people.
The ‘Warburton Range controversy’ and the making of Their Darkest Hour

The ‘Warburton Range controversy’ was a national public debate about the health and welfare of desert Aboriginal people living in and around the Warburton mission, the Rawlinson Range and the Blackstone Range in the Central Aborigines Reserve (‘the Reserve’). The controversy had its provenance in a protracted argument between state and commonwealth governments, anthropologists and activists about how best to manage the fate of those Aboriginal people whose remote existences were set to collide with a series of major national defence projects that began in the late 1940s. Ngaanyatjarra country (Map 1) lay directly under the flight path of the Blue-Streak (non-atomic) missiles being tested by the Woomera Research Establishment (WRE). In 1956, an area of Ngaanyatjarra country in the Rawlinson Range near the present day community of Warakurna had been excised from the Reserve and hosted a weather station that fed meteorological data back to the WRE. Giles weather station, as this little outpost came to be known, was the first permanent colonial occupation in the area of the Rawlinson Range and at the time a number of yarriangu families continued to live in the area relatively independently of the Warburton mission.

In February 1957 William Grayden, a war veteran from the conservative side of politics, and Victorian Aboriginal activist, church pastor and football star Doug Nicholls, made a journey together from Perth into Ngaanyatjarra country. They were on a mission to prove that Aboriginal residents of the Reserve were struggling to survive in an era of increasing defence and mining activity. Determined to provide tangible evidence, Grayden took with him a Bell and Howell 16mm film camera. The images Grayden shot on this trip form the basis of Their Darkest Hour and were also published in his book Adam and Atoms (1957). The film is one of the earliest examples of activist documentary in Australia, and in the sphere of Indigenous social justice arguably one of the more successful. Shown at public meetings in churches, town halls and activist conferences across the nation for years afterwards, the film variously shocked and enraged audiences. It has been attributed with fuelling a wave of public support for the Aboriginal rights movement in New South Wales and Victoria in the late 1950s, support that eventually led to the successful 1967 national ‘citizenship’ referendum to amend

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4 Over a period of two years in the early 1920s the Western Australian, South Australian and Commonwealth governments gazetted large areas of land adjacent to the common borders of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory as Aboriginal reserves. Together these formed the Central Aborigines Reserve, totalling an area of around 170,000 square kilometres. The Reserve was intended to protect Aboriginal people residing in the area from the detrimental influences of frontier contact with settler society. Entry into the Reserve required permission from the relevant government authority (Gara 2003: 19).

5 This history of these developments and the activism surrounding them has been well documented by, among others, Morton 1989; Kerin 2004; Davenport et al 2005.

6 Members of these families would sometimes travel into Warburton or Ernabella missions to attend ceremonies or trade dingo scalps for food goods. ‘Dogging’ (trading scalps) was also facilitated by the Native Patrol Officers who worked around the Rawlinsons and who would trade scalps at the missions on their behalf. By the late 1950s the children of some Rawlinson families were also attending school at the mission.
clauses of the Australian Constitution concerning Aboriginal people. The book, *Adam and Atoms* (1957) included a number of black and white photographs taken by Grayden during the 1957 trip, but also others taken during an earlier expedition to Ngaanyatjarra country four years previously.

Map 1. Ngaanyatjarra communities.

Source: Courtesy of Bruce Ryan.

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Grayden is a far more complex political figure than has previously been acknowledged in histories of the Warburton controversy. It was he, not Nicholls, who was the driving force behind the advocacy on behalf of desert Aborigines. His advocacy was inspired by his participation in a 1953 expedition to the Rawlinson Range in search of the remains of the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt (and possibly the infamous gold reef of ill-fated prospector Lasseter). According to Grayden, what he found instead was a contemporary tragedy of suffering and neglect among the Aboriginal people living there that moved him to radically alter his personal and political priorities: ‘To think that people could survive under those conditions was extraordinary. They were very deprived. I realised there was such a tremendous amount to do for the Aborigines of Western Australia’. When Grayden returned to Perth he launched a campaign to draw attention to their plight.

At the time of his 1953 expedition, Grayden’s political career was already well underway. He had entered the Western Australian Legislative Assembly in 1947 at the age of 27 as a member of the Liberal Party. He held the seat until 1949, when he entered Federal Parliament for the Perth electorate of Swan. He lost his seat in 1954, and re-entered state politics in 1956. He subsequently held the seat of South Perth for 26 years as an Independent Liberal, and later as a Liberal, for 37 years until his retirement in 1993.

Early in his career Grayden had earned a reputation as a ‘young rebel’ of Western Australian politics, infamously unafraid of courting publicity to further his political aims. While known for his humanitarian interest in Aboriginal issues, his financial interest in mining was also widely reported, not always favourably.

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8 Later in his career Grayden’s reputation as a supporter of Aboriginal people was overshadowed by his involvement in Noonkanbah affair in the 1980s. In 1981 the Federal government attempted to restrict the international release of an activist film critical of the Western Australian government’s management of the Noonkanbah affair, On Sacred Ground (1981) over concerns that it would damage Australia’s international image. The film includes an ‘arresting’ scene showing members of the Noonkanbah Aboriginal community listening to a taped message from Grayden, then Minister for Education and Cultural Affairs under Premier Sir Charles Court. Grayden reportedly speaks to them ‘in tones usually reserved for addressing school children’. More importantly, he refused to recognise the sacred sites that community members asserted would be impacted by the mining. It is these events, rather than his advocacy at the time of the Warburton controversy, for which he is most remembered in histories of Aboriginal activism in Western Australia. See Hawke and Gallagher 1989: 170.


12 ‘The young rebel: Bill Grayden MP believes in keeping himself in the public eye – at all times’, People, 1 May 1957: 35.

13 Accompanying Grayden on his 1953 expedition was the owner of a gold mine near the town of Laverton, Stan Bridgeman. Grayden himself admitted to having researched the location of Lasseter’s Rawlinson Range peggings prior to departing on the expedition, and while in the area having ‘a cursory look’ around. There was controversy in the press about this at the time, with suggestions that the search for Leichhardt was futile and that Grayden was inappropriately drawing on government funds to finance it. People, 1 May 1957: 35; Grayden 2002: 8; Ferrell 1989: 121.
Shortly after his re-election in 1956, Grayden began to lobby hard for an investigation into the possible effects of proposed atomic weapons testing at Maralinga on ‘nomadic natives’ in the Reserve, and made efforts to thwart a proposal to remove children from the Warburton mission to attend school in Laverton.\textsuperscript{14} His efforts were encouraged by a correspondence with activist and medical doctor Charles Duguid, who had been involved in protests against the proposed ‘rocket range’ in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{15} A parliamentary select committee was subsequently established to investigate Aboriginal welfare in the Reserve. It was comprised of representatives from all three political parties represented in the state parliament at the time: Labor, the Liberal and Country League, and the Democratic and Country League, as well as Grayden himself.\textsuperscript{16} In November 1956 the Select Committee spent a week in the area of Laverton and the Warburton mission interviewing various non-Aboriginal locals including pastoralists, schoolteachers, missionaires and police.\textsuperscript{17} While at Warburton they saw a group of Rawlinson Range people who had only days before walked into the mission from the north near Mitika, a rock hole approximately 100 kilometres north of Warburton mission. They would come to be known as the ‘Famous Forty’ for the publicity they subsequently received. Some of them had never been into the mission before, and many were reported to be ‘in a starving condition and were extremely emaciated’.\textsuperscript{18}

The Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into Native Welfare Conditions in the Laverton-Warburton Range Area (‘the Select Committee Report’) tabled in parliament in December 1956 detailed numerous hardships faced by many Aboriginal people in the area: a lack of adequate food and water supplies; high incidents of diseases such as yaws and trachoma; frequent accidents such as burns from rolling into sleeping fires; unnecessary mortality due to preventable illnesses; and a lack of local opportunities for education and employment.\textsuperscript{19} The Commonwealth government’s appropriation of land for the establishment of the Giles weather station was identified as an issue of great concern. The Report recommended an immediate increase of medical resources to missions servicing the area; the cessation of the policy of removal of children; the provision of more frequent and reliable water sources; the development of an Aboriginal-based pastoral and agricultural industry; and a relaxing of the ‘isolationist’ approach to the management of the Reserve.\textsuperscript{20} Four days before Christmas at ten to four in the morning, the recommendations of the Select Committee Report were accepted by the Western Australian state legislature.

At first the Select Committee Report received very little attention in either the local or national press. It was only after articles highlighting the worst of

\textsuperscript{14} ABC News Service, 16 August 1956, in possession of William Grayden, Perth.
\textsuperscript{15} Letters from Duguid to Grayden, 1957–58, in possession of William Grayden, Perth. See Kerin 2004 for more information on Duguid’s activism.
\textsuperscript{16} Grayden 1957: 6.
\textsuperscript{17} Grayden 1957: 7.
\textsuperscript{18} Grayden 1957: 22.
\textsuperscript{19} Grayden 1957: 36–38.
\textsuperscript{20} Grayden 1957: 16, 41.
the problems identified by the Select Committee appeared in eastern states socialist newspapers such as *The Tribune*, that mainstream media sat up and took notice. Journalist Rupert Murdoch, who at the time ran both *The News* in Adelaide and the *Sunday Times* in Perth, filed editorials criticising the findings of the Select Committee as exaggerated and misleading. Grayden and his supporters responded with articles of their own. The controversy escalated, and in early February 1957 Murdoch chartered a flight to investigate conditions on the Reserve first hand. He spent a day in Giles, and while there interviewed Robert Macaulay, a young anthropology graduate from Sydney who had only months before been appointed to the position of WRE Native Patrol Officer based at Giles. Macaulay confirmed for Murdoch that ‘the general health of the Rawlinson people appeared extremely sound judged by Aboriginal standards’. Murdoch subsequently ran a series of articles claiming he had spoken to a number of local Aboriginal people, none of whom agreed with the findings of the Select Committee Report and that ‘these people were generally in fine shape and had profited much from the controlled intrusion of the white man into this area’. A barrage of articles and editorials in other papers followed, with accusations of exaggeration, manipulation and ignorance coming from all sides. With the controversy raging and the reliability of the Select Committee Report publicly undermined, Western Australian Minister for Native Affairs, John Brady, resolved to personally survey the conditions on the Reserve. On 19 February 1957, he set out for Laverton from Kalgoorlie accompanied by two Department of Native Welfare (DNW) District Officers McLarty and Harman, and a policeman Sergeant Anderson. It was the first time that officers from the DNW had ventured beyond the Warburton mission. Two journalists from the *Daily News* and the *West Australian* joined them. Travelling with Brady’s convoy was a party of five medical professionals who were to conduct a survey of Aboriginal people’s health.

Frustrated with growing public scepticism about the conditions he reported on the Reserve, Grayden decided to trail Brady’s official government expedition with one of his own. Returning to the Reserve for the second time in three

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23 Grayden 1957: 52.

24 ‘Rawlinson Natives never better off’, *Sunday Times* [1957]. In possession of W Grayden, Perth.

25 ‘I had no alternative — I saw twice as many natives’, Murdoch in *The West*, 12 February 1957.


27 Central Board of Health, State Records Office of Western Australia [hereafter SROWA], Series 268, Item 1957/0283: 77. The anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt, at the time employed at the newly established Department of Anthropology at the University of Western Australia, were asked to report on the situation and visited Warburton mission shortly afterwards. A team of medical experts followed soon afterwards.
months, this time Grayden asked Doug Nicholls and Select Committee member Stan Lapham to join him.\textsuperscript{28} Nicholls’ interest in the Aboriginal people of the Central Aborigines Reserve was not new. In 1946 he had joined Charles Duguid and anthropologist Donald Thomson to lobby against the establishment of the long-range missile testing programme. Their actions had resulted in a personal assurance from the Governor General at the time that Aboriginal people living in the area would be given ‘every attention and protection’ from the impacts of national defence projects.\textsuperscript{29} Perhaps fearing a broken promise, Nicholls accepted Grayden’s invitation and hastily packed his bags for Perth. Only weeks before he had been in the audience of a public screening of a film showing the ‘squalor’ of Aboriginal camps in the Northern Territory settlement of Aileron.\textsuperscript{30}

In total these two expeditions constituted an unusually large influx of visitors into the Reserve and many \textit{yarnangu} were reportedly aware of their presence, if not their purpose, as they journeyed through the area. Both the Ministerial and Grayden’s parties arrived at the Warburton mission from Laverton on 23 February. Nicholls was invited to assist with the Sunday church service the following day. Native Patrol Officer Walter MacDougall arrived shortly after, and the next day escorted Brady’s party on a two-day inspection of the surrounding area. The entire convoy followed. Travelling in the height of summer and likely in excessive heat, dust and wind, the road-train of bureaucrats, doctors, journalists and politicians in jeeps and trucks inspected a number of rock holes near Warburton with the assistance of Aboriginal men resident at the mission. They came across a large group people camped at Mitika, among them families from the Rawlinson Range and some of the ‘Famous 40’ whose condition had caused the Select Committee members so much concern three months earlier when they had arrived at the mission in poor condition.\textsuperscript{31} They had recently left the mission and were returning home. According to DNW District Officer McLarty, they were already planning to backtrack to the mission because the resources at Mitika were close to depletion. In his words, the group were not, however, ‘short of water’ and ‘not seriously short of food’, and they were fit to walk to Warburton unassisted. Another group had just left Mitika to walk north to Giles, led by Grayden’s guide during his 1953 expedition, Mitawali Wally Porter.\textsuperscript{32}

McLarty’s report contrasts starkly to the situation as reported by Select Committee member Lapham, who suggested that among their numbers there were individuals who were too ill and malnourished to hunt, let alone make their own way back to the mission.\textsuperscript{33} Grayden was horrified and filmed the people they met at Mitika, the resulting images proving to be some of the most

\textsuperscript{28} Grayden’s wife also accompanied the party.
\textsuperscript{29} Clark 1965: 83.
\textsuperscript{30} ‘They saw natives in death march’, \textit{The Sun}, 18 January 1957.
\textsuperscript{31} Patrol Report No 2 of 56/57, Central District, SROWA, Series 268, Item 1957/0283: 73.
\textsuperscript{32} Lapham to Commissioner of Native Welfare, Middleton, 14 March 1957. In possession of David Brooks, Canberra.
\textsuperscript{33} Lapham to Commissioner of Native Welfare, Middleton, 14 March 1957. In possession of David Brooks, Canberra.
distressing for audiences who later saw Their Darkest Hour and read Adam and Atoms. McLarty, who was present during filming at Mitika, told of how Grayden selected ‘any subject which might be used to support his published statements’ and avoided ‘anything which would not’. Grayden reportedly went to such extremes that Minister Brady ‘was obliged to remonstrate with him’, while McLarty and Assistant District Officer John Harman ‘withdrew in anger and disgust’. 34

The convoy returned to Warburton, and a few days later made their way east to Blackstone mining camp. There they met a group of approximately 50 adults and children, many from Warburton, who had walked to Blackstone to visit family while the mission was closed for the ‘Christmas time’ holiday. Among their numbers were also members of families who had ‘country’ in the immediate area and who regularly spent time there. Lapham stated that the group were there in order to find work because they were otherwise starving; McLarty suggested the migration east was in keeping with traditional seasonal migrations. McLarty’s report contains no details of food shortages, and he notes that three women and two men among the people camped at Blackstone took the opportunity to exchange dingo scalps for trade goods. 35 Lapham, on the other hand, recorded that the group was without adequate food and were waiting for rain before returning to Warburton. 36 Grayden and Nicholls purchased basic foodstuffs for the families from the nearby mining camp and filmed while Nicholls distributed them to families. During this exchange Nicholls spoke to Stewart Davies, a yarnangu man who often acted as an intermediary between his people and various incomers, but there is no record about what was said between them (Fig 1).

While at Blackstone, Grayden also filmed an old man by the name of Mr Jacky Forbes. Mr Forbes had lost his foot following a spear fight with his brother George many years before. He remained mobile and living semi-independently of the mission using a crutch and an enormous bandage that acted as an artificial foot. He was very shy about his disability and reportedly would insist on complete privacy whenever the bandage was removed. Philip West was a good friend of Mr Forbes and was with him when Grayden asked to film his injury. Mr Forbes agreed but insisted that they do so in the bush away from the camp so that no one else would see. 37 Grayden also filmed his blind brother, George. 38 Grayden’s

37 West, P, pers comm 20 May 2008. When Mr West watched Manslaughter for the first time in 2008, he expressed surprise that he too was not featured in the film as he had helped Mr Forbes unwrap his foot so Grayden could film him.
38 Lane, F, pers comm 8 May 2009. The story of how these two brothers came to be lame and blind is well known among family and older yarnangu. After Jacky lost his foot after a spear fight with his brother George, he retaliated by rubbing a poisonous plant in his brother’s eyes, permanently blinding him.
filming activities did not go unnoticed. The journalists and the manager of the nickel mine later reported to the Deputy Director of the Bureau of Meteorology that Grayden and Nicholls had ‘lined up the cameras and then allowed the natives to scramble for supplies.’

At this point in the journey the convoy split. Brady and the medical party, along with the two reporters, travelled onto Giles leaving Grayden and Nicholls at Blackstone. A handful of Rawlinson families camped at Warupuyu, a soak and traditional camping site located at a ‘gap’ in the ranges a few kilometres from Giles, were about to leave the area, but were convinced to stay by Macaulay in order to receive health checks from the visiting medical party. Macaulay carted water to them at their camp so they had sufficient to stay a few more days. By the end of the week more people had arrived, possibly in preparation for a ceremony, but possibly hoping to meet the expedition who they knew had been travelling in that direction. Among them were the group that Mitawali Porter had led from Mitika less than a week before. They had been travelling by foot and had walked over 100 kilometres. Grayden arrived at Giles a day or two after Brady had left, and camped overnight. He spent time filming around the station and at the Aboriginal camp at Warupuyu, and also filmed Nicholls examining a group of children of various ages, and interacting with a group of adults as they sat quietly in the shade of a small grove of trees.

Grayden’s party left to return to Warburton the following day. When they got there they were told that a man’s body had been found by a dried up water hole near Mitika. They travelled with Sgt Anderson and Ngaanyatjarra man Don Richards to investigate. At the time the identity of the man was unknown by Grayden, the missionarries or the police, but local yarnangu had their suspicions about who it was and why he died there. That the identity of the man and the cause of his death were unknown mattered little to Grayden. He got out his camera and filmed while the others dug a shallow grave and buried the body. Upon their return to Perth, Grayden hastily processed the footage accumulated during the trip, and he and Nicholls wrote a script for a spoken commentary. The result was *Their Darkest Hour*. In the following months he had also self-published *Adam and Atoms*, and the book was in circulation by May 1957.

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39 Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology Regional Office Western Australia, National Archives of Australia [hereafter NAA], Series PP470/1, Item 761.
42 Grayden continued to distribute copies of the book for some years to come. During his February 1959 campaign for the seat of Swan, he glued a letter into the front cover before delivery. It stated that that, ‘I offer you this book to prove to you that where injustice is concerned, I do not spare myself in time or effort’. In possession of P McGrath, Canberra.
Images of Their Darkest Hour

What does Grayden’s film look like? Filmed in grainy, contrasty colour, Their Darkest Hour runs for just over 20 minutes. The film shows images of the Aboriginal people Grayden and Nicholls met at Laverton, Warburton mission, Blackstone, Giles and Mitika rock hole in 1957. With sync-sound technology still some years away, the footage was recorded without a soundtrack and a pre-recorded voice-over was not produced until it was screened in a local cinema and on television later that year. When shown at public meetings, the commentary drafted by Grayden and Nicholls was read aloud by an invited speaker. The film was never intended for theatrical release and therefore has no opening title or production credits. No Ngaanyatjarra people are named in the narration or in Adam and Atoms, and no biographical details other than brief explanations of people’s ailments are included.

Their Darkest Hour begins with an image of the town of Laverton, the last settlement before entering the Reserve from the west. The first Aboriginal person the audience sees is an old, blind woman in a camp at the Laverton Aboriginal reserve. She wears torn and dirty clothing and is sitting on the ground with her dog. She hides her face, avoiding looking at the camera. She can be seen saying something, but we are not told what. The narrator tells us, ‘This lonely old woman is blind.’

We see scenes of a truck driving along a dirt road and traversing sand dunes as the party journeys towards the Warburton mission. There are shots of the carcasses of dead animals and a circling bird of prey. The scenes of the mission show a number of Aboriginal children in clean clothes engaged in various activities: smiling and laughing, playing in a dusty yard, drinking goats’ milk from a tin. The narrator says, ‘Mr Wade [the missionary] has a small cauliflower patch. The children love the cauliflower stalks and eat them in the same way as our children eat apples.’ A number of neatly dressed Aboriginal adults wander past a mission house. A group of people queue at the door of the one-room hospital, waiting to see the nurse.

A montage of images of groups of people sitting along the mission fence follows. They are all in tattered remnants of European clothing. A group of Aboriginal men sit together; they are unsmiling and look directly at the camera, their spears visible on the ground in front of them. A group of women sitting in front of wilija (shelters) smile and laugh as a small child in a cardigan plays with a billycan. One woman shows off her wedding ring. Other women avoid looking at the camera, turning their heads away. We see a close-up of a burn on a baby’s leg, and a woman with a wound on her arm that the narrator tells us is a symptom of the leprosy-like disease yaws. The film cuts to a shot of a thin, naked child standing alone in front a small building. He is not smiling and avoids looking directly at the camera. He twists his fingers. The narrator tells us: ‘Some of these
natives were with a party of 43 that reached the Mission in a starving condition a few weeks before the film was taken. Three died after reaching the Mission. It is not known how many died on the journey in from the desert.

The action moves to the mining camp of Blackstone. Doug Nicholls is seen handing out tins of food to a large group of people who are gathered around a truck (Fig 1). The narrator comments, ‘At Blackstone we find 50 natives who are without food. The mining company is not permitted to provide food or medical attention for them.’ Nicholls talks to members of the group, including Stewart Davies, but we do not know what they say. The film cuts to the image of Mr Forbes walking with a crutch, one foot heavily bandaged such that it resembles an elephant’s foot. The next shot shows a close-up of the bandage. The next one is of his unbandaged leg, revealing that he is missing a foot. The camera lingers on his naked stump while the narrator tells us he has recently walked to Blackstone from Warburton, a distance of almost 200 kilometres. There is a shot of another old Aboriginal man, holding onto a stick, being led by an Aboriginal woman away into the bush. The narration continues: ‘This is George, an old blind native who set out last Christmas with two other blind women to walk 600 miles to Ernabella Mission in South Australia’.

Fig 1. Doug Nicholls addresses a group of people at Blackstone, February 1957. Footage of this meeting appears in Their Darkest Hour. The Aboriginal man in the knitted hat standing on his right is Stewart Davies. On the far left Mr Forbes can be seen standing with his head bowed, also wearing a knitted hat and holding the stick he used for a crutch.

Source: Grayden 1957: 96.
The action then moves to Giles weather station in the Rawlinson Range, where we are told: ‘the natives are forced to live in close contact with the whites’. The film shows a group of unsmiling Aboriginal people in tattered clothing sitting together in the shade of some small trees. A group of seven children aged between approximately four and eight years of age are shown standing in a line in front of a yellow truck, likely that of the Native Patrol Officer Robert Macaulay. The film cuts to a close-up of the same group of children, focusing on their torsos:

Some of the children are from the Mission Home. Each year the Mission goes into recess for three months. Then the children who for the remaining months of the year have been clothed and fed on White food are returned to their parents and all have to fend for themselves.

Out of sequence with actual events, the film then shows Grayden’s party travelling to Mitika. Again the audience sees a montage of images of Aboriginal people, many children. There is a close-up shot of a boy approximately seven years old, standing on his own. His stomach is extremely distended and he looks blankly at the camera. We are told: ‘There are 43 natives camped at the hole when we reach it, 19 of who are children. Almost all the children are clearly suffering from malnutrition’. The camera films Nicholls providing water to two very skinny young boys whose stomachs are engorged with the water they hastily drink. Another little boy chews on a kangaroo bone that looks uncooked. A forth looks up into the camera, his eyes full of flies. The narrator asks: ‘These people are trained hunters. Would they be in this condition if food and water is plentiful on the Reserve, as some people have stated?’

The next scene shows Nicholls helping a woman with a sick baby into the back of the truck:

The natives said that the mother’s milk had dried up and they feared the baby would die that night. The mother was so weak that she had to be assisted to her feet. We took her back to the Mission in our truck.

The film ends with the discovery and burial of the remains of the man found at the dry waterhole near Mitika. We see close-ups of his skull and torso from a number of different angles, and watch while three men bury him in a shallow grave. The final words of the spoken narrative are: ‘The body is buried. No cairn marks the spot. Human life has little value on the Warburton Reserve’.

Circulating Their Darkest Hour

From what we know about the reception of Their Darkest Hour and Adam and Atoms, audiences found these images confronting. They were intended to be. Grayden’s choice of framing reflected his firm belief that audiences needed to be shocked into recognising that Aboriginal people were suffering terribly and the citizens of Australia had a responsibility to do something about it. In his mind the strength of his concern justified the intrusion of his camera in circumstances where filming might otherwise be considered inappropriate, for example the
filming of Mr Forbes’ foot without its bandage, or the filming of the dead man. For Nicholls as well these were deeply disturbing scenes and his experiences reportedly had a profound impact on his personal and political world view:

Everywhere we went they pleaded for food and water, it is terrible. I wish I had not gone to the Warburton Ranges. I wish I hadn’t seen the pitiable squalor, the sights of my people starving – the most shocking sights I have ever seen. Never, never can I forget.

The film was first screened in March 1957 at the Central Methodist Mission Hall in Perth, with Grayden reading the accompanying commentary. Nicholls took a copy of the film with him when he headed home to Melbourne later that week. Soon after he screened it at a meeting of individuals concerned about Aboriginal welfare, in part inspiring their decision to form the Aborigines Advancement League. Other copies were made and widely distributed through the networks of organisations such as the Federal Council of Aboriginal Advancement and was screened at churches, trade unions and film groups across the country. Nicholls spoke at many of these early meetings. Grayden organised for a six week screening during April and May 1957 at the Theatrette Mayfair in Perth, claiming that it generated much interest, doubling usual attendances.

Their Darkest Hour had a dramatic impact on many who saw it, among them urban Aboriginal people from New South Wales and Victoria. Many people who saw it subsequently wrote letters to bureaucrats and politicians, including Prime Minister Menzies, expressing how the film made them feel ‘thoroughly disgusted’, ‘shocked’ and ‘shamed’, and experienced ‘violent feelings of revulsion’, and demanding something be done about it. One journalist described it as ‘the most horrible film made in Australia’; others compared it to images of the Nazi death camp at Bergen-Belsen and films from Japanese prisoner of war camps. Its
reception in the press was monitored by state and Commonwealth government agencies such as the Department of Native Welfare in Perth and Australian Security Intelligence Organisation in Canberra. The Warburton controversy received attention internationally including from the Malaysian, New Zealand and English press. The Prime Minister’s Office were concerned enough about the potential negative impact on Australia’s international reputation to issue a press release to all diplomatic posts stating that ‘the film is not designed to give a balanced picture of the circumstances of aborigines [sic] either in Australia, in general, or in the area to which the film is particularly related’.

It is impossible to estimate the extent of the film’s circulation in terms of viewing numbers. Data indicating the number and size of meetings at which it was screened are non-existent. But there is evidence that the film continued to circulate widely into the early 1960s. Aboriginal activist Faith Bandler showed the film to Black American singer, actor and civil rights activist Paul Robeson during a visit to Australia in the early 1960s. His response was one that Bandler would never forget: ‘Tears came to his eyes and when the film finished he stood up and he pulled his cap off and he threw it in his rage on the floor’. Its screening on television in 1957, only a year after the technology was introduced to Australia, is significant. Peters-Little suggests television was responsible for breaking ‘the invisibility of Aborigines to mainstream white Australia’, and the images of Their Darkest Hour were some of the first to be aired. As far as we know, however, the film was not screened at the Warburton mission or anywhere else in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands until 50 years later.

Grayden’s images were crucial evidence for his advocacy, and their injection into the public debate of the Warburton controversy resulted in an escalation of the use and abuse of photographs and films of Aboriginal people by others as well. Articles supportive of Grayden’s position were often illustrated with photographs (not always taken by Grayden) of rake thin children with distended abdomens, carrying headlines such as ‘The swollen stomach of malnutrition’. Many of the countering articles by Murdoch and his journalists were illustrated with photographs that were as equally reassuring as Grayden’s were shocking, such as one of smiling Aboriginal children swimming in a waterhole near Warburton mission. None of the scores of newspaper articles that used such

55 For example, ASIO Central Office, NAA, Series A6122/44, Items 1524 and 1525; Department of Territories, NAA, Series A452, Item 1957/245.
57 ASIO Central Office, NAA, Series A6122/44, Item 1524.
58 Hughes 2009: np.
60 In an article in The West Australian, a member of the Select Committee member claimed ‘we can back up our report with photographs of the poor creatures’. ‘Aborigines eat poison bait’, West Australian, 16 January 1957.
61 [Unknown, 1957]. In possession of W Grayden, Perth.
62 ‘Fun in the waterhole’, West Australian, 6 March 1957.
images, however, identified the Aboriginal people in them or offered yarnangu perspectives on the issue. The issues were usually simplistically reported and the circumstances of semi-nomadic families were confused with the living conditions at the Warburton mission, much to the chagrin of local missionaries and their supporters who were proud of the support they gave with few resources. The missionaries returned fire by publishing images of their own in the United Aborigines Mission monthly newsletter. Atomic tests at Maralinga (some 800 kilometres to the south-east of Rawlinson Range) were conflated with the WRE long-range missile testing and the establishment of Giles, even in Grayden’s mind. And at least one press article reported, incorrectly, that over 1000 Aborigines had been thrown out of the Reserve to make way for the weather station. William Bodney, a prominent Nyungar elder from Perth and President of the Coolbaroo League, accused Grayden of misleading the public with his photographs, and demanded that the government ‘put a stop to such political adventuring and such similar forms of exploitation of our people and get on with its job of giving us equal rights’. A few years after the events of 1957, Nicholls himself admitted his discomfort with the way yarnangu had been represented: ‘The thing became a political football … It is wrong to make people a football’.

Away from the press, many non-Aboriginal people who had worked long-term with Ngaanyatjarra people suggested Grayden’s assessment of the extent of people’s ill-health was inaccurate. Teams of anthropologists and doctors who visited the area found no widespread disease or starvation and agreed that the situation had been exaggerated. Macaulay claimed that Grayden’s assessment of the conditions of people living in the Rawlinson Range near the weather station was ‘so inaccurate and unreliable as to be of little use’. Olive Graham, the nurse at Warburton mission who cared for many of the individuals filmed by Grayden, stated that while it was certainly true that a group of approximately 50 individuals came in from the Rawlinson Range in a ‘shocking condition’ in November 1956, ‘it is very wrong to give the public the impression that the natives in the Laverton-Warburton-Rawlinson area are dying of malnutrition’.

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63 The monthly newsletter of the United Aborigines Mission of Australia for May 1957 contains a number of photographs of children from the mission that emphasised the care they received there, describing them as ‘happy’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘worthy of the public spotlight’. United Aborigines Messenger, vol XXV, no 4, 1 May 1957.
64 ‘Natives die for a weather station’, The Sun, 18 January 1957.
65 ‘We must end this scandal’, The Sun, 22 January 1957.
66 Bodney, W [Unknown publisher] 7 February 1957. In possession of W. Grayden, Perth. The Coolbaroo League (1946–1964) was the Aboriginal-controlled community organisation who published Westralian Aborigine newspaper, in which Grayden had previously received positive press about his 1953 expedition to the Rawlinson Range. The League were instrumental in lobbying the Western Australian state government on issues such as the removal of children, citizenship laws, deaths in custody, and civil rights law reform (Kinnane 2007).
Fig 2. Advertisement for Grayden’s Warburton Range film.

The other side of *Their Darkest Hour*

The truth of the matter of people’s distress and the need for intervention was then, and is now, difficult to determine. Some facts are clear. The poor health of some of those filmed by Grayden was due to a lack of food during a time of intense but highly localised drought, described by Macaulay as ‘the culmination of the second worst drought period in the memory of the older Rawlinson natives’.\(^{71}\) In interviews about this time, older *yarnangu* acknowledge that the circumstances of the people filmed by Grayden were unusual, but accept it as a part of living life ‘in the bush’. This was a ‘dry year’, a ‘hungry time’, and while *yarnangu* appear to have been appreciative of the immediate efforts made by Grayden and Nicholls towards relieving their hunger, the circumstances in which the filmmakers had found them are remembered as highly localised and temporary. The patrol reports of Macaulay for the years 1956 to 1958 confirm this.\(^{72}\) More compellingly, the photographs that Macaulay took of many *yarnangu* families over a nine year period between 1956 and 1964 show that many of the people filmed by Grayden were otherwise fit and continued to live mostly independently of the mission for some years to come.\(^{73}\) Many, including Mitawali Wally Porter, were filmed just months later by Ian Dunlop from the Commonwealth Film Unit, who had been tasked with making a documentary about the construction of Giles, *Balloons and Spinifex* (1958). Although a problematic film for other reasons, the good health of those filmed by Dunlop contrasts dramatically with the portrayal of their circumstances as shown by Grayden.

*Yarnangu* perspectives on this period of their history recorded during local viewings of *Their Darkest Hour* differ considerably to Grayden’s portrayal of desert life as unviable. In its efforts to convince, the film failed to acknowledge the richness and strength of Ngaanyatjarra people’s lives and the complexity of their engagement with the emerging modernity of the Western Desert under Australian colonialism. Many of the people in *Their Darkest Hour* are known and closely related to people who continue to live in the communities of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. Some of those filmed by Grayden are still alive. When *yarnangu* today watch this film they do not see suffering strangers, but familiars – grandparents, mothers, children, lovers and enemies – who remain present in their immediate lives or their recent memories. There is a degree of pragmatism in many people’s responses to Grayden’s images of the physical hardships associated with living an independent bush life. People acknowledged that some individuals in the film were indeed very ill, expressing compassion for

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72 These patrol reports are located in ‘Military and Defence. Weapons Research Establishment, Reports and correspondence regarding Natives and Native Reserves’, SROWA, Series 2030, Item 1956/0280.
73 The photographic collection of Robert Macaulay currently remains held privately by Macaulay. There are plans to permanently repatriate this collection to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands. His collection has, in the meantime, been digitised and re-documented with *yarnangu* to identify the names and biographical details of those he photographed. This research was undertaken by Pamela McGrath in 2008 and 2009 in conjunction with the re-documentation of *Their Darkest Hour*. 
their suffering with the phrase, ‘Ngarlutjarra, poor thing!’ 74 But people also recognised that many were not, and rather this was how their lives had been at this point in their history. As one older woman put it after seeing her family in Their Darkest Hour, ‘They had to be like that, living in the bush!’ 75

Grayden’s camera could not convey to distant and unfamiliar audiences some of the crucial truths about desert life. Able to carry only a few material possessions, including clothes, it was a given that nomadic and semi-nomadic families lived with a high level of what most non-desert dwellers would consider discomfort and poverty. They were especially vulnerable to physical injury and hardly any adult was without the scars of serious burns, combat or disease. Not only did people have scars and other damage, but the lack of clothing meant they were visible for all to see. Their own society normalised their appearance to themselves, but at the best of times the body image of a desert Aborigine as conveyed through a camera was a challenge to the norms of well-being assumed by most audiences of 1950s urban Australia.

The differences between local and non-local responses to Their Darkest Hour epitomises what historian Tim Rowse has identified as an enduring confusion over the ‘norms of wellbeing’ associated with Indigenous health and living conditions in Australia.76 How do we determine the quality of life of an Aboriginal person whose social, cultural and economic circumstances differ so much from those of the ‘average’ westernised citizen? Being close to the edge – foregoing clothes and most possessions – was crucial to Ngaanyatjarra people’s ability to be highly mobile, which in turn was a pre-requisite to survival as a hunter-gatherer in an arid environment. It was a lifestyle that was both viable and desirable. The way the Aboriginal subjects of Their Darkest Hour looked largely went hand-in-hand with the fact that they were successfully choosing to continue to occupy their traditional lands in heart of the desert.

The film also portrays yarnangu as somehow separate from and ignorant of the outside world. But Ngaanyatjarra people of the 1950s might also be understood not as the passive victims of history – neglected, naïve inhabitants of a vanishing corner of the world – but as members of a society that had purposefully remained living in the desert at and around Warburton and north to the Rawlinson Range. Experience of a wider world that included the goldfields of Laverton and Kalgoorlie had existed among Ngaanyatjarra people since at least the 1890s, 60 years before Their Darkest Hour was made. Even the relatively isolated families of the Rawlinson Range had some knowledge of the ‘outside’ world, with members of their families having walked a route to Warburton and Laverton since at least the 1930s, a trip that took several weeks. Far from seeing themselves as flotsam tossed about by colonial forces unleashed in the wider world, yarnangu see their history and their circumstances during this period as largely the outcome of

74 Ngarlutjarra (‘poor thing!’) is a Ngaanyatjarra term used to express one’s sympathy or affection for someone or something, or one’s sadness about a situation.
75 Watson, D, pers comm 18 May 2008.
processes and events that they themselves have determined, or at least actively responded to. For example, the journey of the ‘Famous Forty’ filmed by Grayden at Mitika is remembered in family oral histories not as a great tragedy, but as an exceptional event, their arduous but courageous trek into the mission in November 1956 recalled with considerable awe. Similarly, the death of the man whose body was found at Mitika is attributed not to thirst but to a complex set of events resulting from his transgression of traditional Aboriginal Law in his Pitjantjatjara homelands many hundreds of kilometres to the east of Warburton. Many yarnangu interviewed about the film feel that Grayden’s decision to film this man was insensitive, and people were shocked and horrified that a stranger had filmed his remains. More galling is the knowledge that images of his body are still in circulation and might be seen by members of his immediate family who are still alive and resident in the Anangu Aboriginal Lands of South Australia.

The question remains as to whether or not Grayden’s narrow filmic portrayal of yarnangu lives was, in the end, worth the historical misrepresentation it has since perpetuated. It is emphatically the case that Grayden and Nicholls’ cause was legitimate and humane insofar as they tried to bring the Western Australian government to account for its lamentable failure to engage with the circumstances of remote Indigenous people. Nonetheless the record shows that their efforts gained little ground for yarnangu in terms of material benefit despite the value to the Aboriginal rights movement nationally. Two years after the ‘Warburton controversy’, anthropologist Ronald Berndt concluded that while there had been some ‘minor’ changes to the social circumstances of Aboriginal people living in the Ngaanyatjarra region, few of these were attributable to the publicity generated by the Select Committee Report. Increased public awareness of the Aboriginal people living in the Western Desert resulted, however, in increased surveillance of their movements by the Western Australian government, and ultimately a loss of mobility (although not necessarily of social autonomy). The controversy created a political climate conducive to proposing significant legislative change designed to afford Aboriginal people of Western Australia citizenship rights, but in 1957 and 1958 two versions of the ‘Natives (Status as Citizens) Bill’ nevertheless failed to pass through the WA Legislative Assembly. What did endure, argues historian Sue Davenport, was a public image of Aboriginal suffering and starvation that was ‘easily exploited’ for political gain.

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77 David Brooks first heard yarnangu talking about this matter when undertaking a field trip with Warburton people in the Mitika locality in 1989. At this time he had not heard of Grayden or of Their Darkest Hour. The cause of this man’s death was raised in the WA Legislative Assembly in August 1957 following an unconfirmed press report that he had been murdered. Department of Native Welfare, SROWA, Series 2030, Item 1957/0384: 93.
78 Berndt 1959: 58.
79 Brooks 2002: 76.
80 The initial version of this bill failed to be passed after Grayden initiated a move to remove clauses which gave the Commissioner of Native Welfare legal guardianship over native children. See Berndt 1959.
81 Davenport et al 2005: 44.
far less fanfare) to revisit circumstances in the Reserve in 1971, he was granted a permit only on the condition that he was not to take photographs of Aboriginal people without their prior consent. The most significant outcome of Grayden and Nicholls’ advocacy in the Ngaanyatjarra area may well have been on the issue that is today referred to as ‘stolen generations’. Grayden was a fierce opponent of the removal of children from the care of their parents, and in the Select Committee Report argued against plans to transfer all Aboriginal children from Warburton mission to the town of Cosmo Newbry. They were, in the end, never implemented.

**Their Darkest Hour and the politics of representation**

The complex and at times positive responses of *yarnangu* to Grayden’s images of friends and family in *Their Darkest Hour* mask deeper concerns felt by some *yarnangu* about the taking of Grayden’s images. Research on the attitudes of Ngaanyatjarra people to the taking of films and photographs by outsiders has revealed a general distrust of strangers with cameras and considerable anxiety about the viewing of images that may cause others distress. In recent times, *yarnangu* have taken various steps towards attempting to manage the ‘hard look’ of outsider image-makers but the digital age, which has been a boon in terms of the capacity to self-represent, has also made controversial images such as these very easy to reproduce and access. Such is the anxiety over the representations of outsiders that Ngaanyatjarra efforts have even at times influenced aspects of public self-presentation such as the structure of their communities. The Warburton Roadhouse, one of the main food, fuel and accommodation facilities for both *yarnangu* and travellers through the area, was built in 1985 at a location *outside* the community explicitly in order to keep the unwanted cameras and prying looks of casual tourists at a distance. That these concerns are in fact deeply felt is revealed if one looks at the minutes of the monthly Ngaanyatjarra Council meetings held over the past 30 years. They are rife with complaints from Ngaanyatjarra people about various violations of privacy. Such concerns are linked to a belief that photos showing squalor, evidence of petrol sniffing and the like are highly prized commodities in the media market. The images of *Their Darkest Hour* are seen in a similar light today. The debilitating sense of shame such images generate among *yarnangu* is pervasive and cannot be underestimated. Self-representation on its own only partially challenges the ongoing portrayal of people’s lives by others.

In the context of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum, *Their Darkest Hour* and the events of the ‘Warburton Controversy’ have received renewed interest from filmmakers, museum curators, journalists, artists and

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83 Department of Native Affairs, SROWA, Series 2030, Item 1947/0076; Kral 2007.
84 Research carried out by Pamela McGrath towards her recently completed PhD thesis, ‘Hard looking: an historical ethnography of the filming and photography of Ngaanyatjarra families’. A ‘hard look’ is a colloquialism sometimes used by *yarnangu* to describe the act of staring.
academics. Working towards increasing the prominence of this important part of Australian history, filmmakers Rachel Perkins, Frances Peters-Little, Katherine Aigner and artist rea (Regina Saunders) have all utilised excerpts from Grayden’s footage in film documentaries, at times using them to illustrate the impact of atomic testing on remote Aboriginal communities. Although permission for use was obtained from the Ngaanyatjarra Council prior to production in at least one of these instances, it appears that little was known about the actual history of the film. Nor, as far as can be established, were any Ngaanyatjarra people consulted about their opinions of film or the events it represents.

Towards the end of 2006 a group of Warburton Range artists who were participating in an exhibition celebrating 50 years of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Yours, Mine, Ours, were unexpectedly confronted with images from Their Darkest Hour in the work of rea, an Aboriginal artist from Victoria. rea had obtained the footage from the ABC archive to use in a multimedia installation depicting seminal moments in the history of Aboriginal activism (which included Paul Keating’s 1992 ‘Redfern Speech’ and the ‘Vote Yes for Aborigines’ song). Among the Warburton artists were many young people who had never seen Grayden’s film, or anything like it, previously. Their reaction was one of dumbfounded shock at seeing their families portrayed in this way. Agitated by this unexpected and unsanctioned use of images of their people, the Warburton artists requested that the multimedia work not be exhibited. After a failed attempt at mediation, the gallery eventually agreed. Guided by a senior spokesperson for their community, Livingston West, and the Coordinator of the Warburton Arts Project, Albie Viegas, the Warburton artists collaborated to quickly produce a body of work that expressed their responses to the film. A series of powerful paintings about the filming of Aboriginal people by outsiders, and about Their Darkest Hour specifically, were subsequently included in the Yours, Mine, Ours exhibition. These works offered a frank assessment of the

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86 In her television documentary The First Australians, Rachel Perkins used footage of Doug Nicholls tending a group of naked children at Giles immediately before an image of the ‘mushroom cloud’ of a Maralinga test. The intention is clearly to draw an association between the two. Frances Peters-Little does much the same in her documentary Vote Yes for Aborigines (2008). Katherine Aigner’s film Australian Atomic Confessions (2004) uses numerous scenes from Their Darkest Hour, including Nicholls examining a child at Mitika, the baby with a burn on its leg, and the burial of the human remains. She describes the children and the baby as having ‘beta radiation burns’ from the atomic tests. The artist rea described Grayden’s film as providing evidence of ‘the absolutely devastating physical impact that the British nuclear tests had on the Pitjantjara [sic] people the traditional owners of the “bombed” land’. See rea’s exegesis of maang (part 2, 2006) at: <http://www.aucklandtriennial.com/2007/artists/rea.asp?pageType=print (accessed 6 June 2010).


88 This artwork has not been viewed by either author. Details of the installation were provided by Warburton Arts Coordinator at the time, Albie Viegas.


90 An example of these artworks can be found at: <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/yours/artists/landers.htm>
emotional and political impact of Grayden’s film for these artists in work that depicted the unwelcome gaze of strangers in general as ‘hard’, dangerous and without compassion. Their titles alone are telling: *Nyakulayinu Tarrkanu* (literally ‘looking until all that is left is bones’); *Nyakula Papulankupayi* (literally ‘staring at us without recognition’); and *Looking is Deadly*.

Accompanying these works of art was an open letter from Livingston West to the ABC. West’s letter directly addresses the perceived role of *Their Darkest Hour* in perpetuating misguided stereotypes of *yarnangu* as helpless suffering victims, and of desert communities being marginal and unviable. His suggestion that access to such films of Ngaanyatjarra people be restricted speaks to concerns about the capacity of the media and the general public to see beyond the images of *Their Darkest Hour* to a more complex and ultimately positive understanding about the character of remote Aboriginal lives:

> *Kurnta* [shame], it’s shaming to be seen like that. Don’t show that film [in the Sydney exhibition]. It’ll be like discrimination … Put that film away. Put it away, for history. Hold it, but don’t show it to people.

> They still look at Aboriginal people. They don’t recognise and still think that Aboriginal people in that time, eating that meat and the flies, they think still they doing that today.

> Yes, they used it for the referendum, I understand that [but] they made it bad, because they didn’t understand what they were doing.

> It’s still the same now … Instead of encouraging them to stand on their feet, they put them down. Show the worst things.\(^1\)

The ABC responded to West’s letter by identifying the archival footage of Grayden’s film as ‘culturally sensitive’ and restricting access.\(^2\) Anyone wishing to access the footage must now secure approval from the Ngaanyatjarra Council. This was, in the circumstances, the most appropriate course of action for the ABC to take. But the fact that this film has been circulating in the public domain for over 50 years and represents a significant moment in the political history of many other Aboriginal people, makes this a particularly contentious move. What rights do others (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) have to access the images of *Their Darkest Hour* so they too can witness and make up their own mind? How should such rights be positioned in relation to calls from *yarnangu* to respect their privacy and allow them some control over photographs and films of family members, depicted in circumstances that are distressing or shaming? These questions are not easily answered. What is clear, however, is that the significance of Grayden’s and Nicholls’ advocacy cannot be fully understood until historical accounts about these events move away from relying on the images of *Their Darkest Hour*, and give greater consideration to the perspectives of the Aboriginal people whose lives the film purports to represent. While

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\(^1\) West 2006.

these perspectives may at times challenge the narratives of other historians and filmmakers who are themselves attempting to re-write history from the margins, they remain crucial to understanding the full complexity of the cultural and historical moment that was the ‘Warburton controversy’.

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A short history of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition

Martin Thomas

The American–Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land is sometimes referred to as the ‘last of the big expeditions’. Despite the hype (and there was plenty of that), exploration – at least in the terrestrial sense - was not its purpose. Rather, it was the frontier of knowledge that members of the Expedition hoped to penetrate. This involved co-ordinated study of both the natural environment and its Aboriginal inhabitants. Occurring in the aftermath of World War II, the Arnhem Land Expedition was a watershed event, emblematic of broader transformations in Australia and beyond. In terms of diplomatic objectives, it reflected the desire of Ben Chifley’s Labor Government, then in its last days, to shore up the relationship with the United States through an overt display of collaboration between the two nations. Widely reported in the press, and transmitted to the world through film, radio and print media, this ‘friendly mission’ was a public face to behind-the-scenes negotiations that would shape the trans-Pacific relationship for the remainder of the twentieth century.1 Domestic support for the Arnhem Land Expedition is indicative of the pro-American sentiments of Australia’s major political parties, then adjusting to a post-war climate of decolonisation and the demise of Britain as a global power. It was Chifley’s successor, Robert Menzies, who signed the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) in 1951.

The United States already had a long history of using cultural, scientific and educational programs to pursue its strategic and political interests in foreign nations. Before the war, philanthropic foundations had funded much of this work.2 This had a direct bearing upon Australian Aboriginal studies, for it was Rockefeller funding in the 1920s that established the Department of Anthropology at Sydney, the first in an Australian university.3 After the war, with the establishment of the Fulbright Program in 1948, the American taxpayer became directly involved in this sort of ‘soft’ diplomacy. That the Arnhem Land Expedition was born of similar sentiments, and that it provided a useful opportunity for keeping a paternal eye on developments in Australia, is indicated by a now declassified report to the Secretary of State in Washington, dated December 1948. Its author was the American Consul in Adelaide, Elvin Seibert, who spent a fortnight travelling the Territory while the Expedition was

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1 Beazley 2011.
in progress. His report is richly inscribed with the values of the epoch, most noticeably the Cold War anxieties that played no small part in its inception. The tone, as well as the content, of the reportage gives insight into the way Australia’s vast, though sparsely populated, Northern Territory was viewed from afar as an object of strategic interest – and as the subject of considerable condescension. Seibert speculated on the ‘pinkness or redness’ of unionists and bureaucrats in Darwin. He showed intense curiosity about Britain’s doings in this part of the country: Lord Vestey’s role in the cattle industry and especially the new rocket base at Woomera. He commented on the excellent condition of the wartime airstrips, though the Territory’s ‘leading personalities’ he found less agreeable. ‘The interests and activities of practically all are extremely local. Most of the civil servants are small-bores’, he complained. On the Territory’s race relations, Seibert observed that:

opinion was very much in favour of the ‘White Australia Policy’, and people seemed to be very conscious of the ‘teeming millions of Asia’ casting their eyes covetously on the undeveloped vacancy of northern Australia … The Territory … admits that its mineral possibilities will never be developed properly with white labor, and wishes the Aborigines were not so highly protected that it is practically impossible to employ them below ground, but it still – in my observation – is thoroughly satisfied with the White Australia Policy.4

Seibert’s observations on the Arnhem Land Expedition, which he visited briefly, when it was based at the mission settlement of Yirrkala, I will get to later. Even this brief summary is sufficient to establish that early in the Cold War the bilateral relationship was complicated by an ensemble of strategic and propagandist agendas that inevitably affected a prominent joint undertaking such as a scientific expedition. At times, the imperative to project an image of trans-national harmony put strain on the Expedition’s researchers, and it is possible that the uneasy melange of research and politics damaged the credibility of their work in scientific, and especially anthropological, circles. As we will see, key players in Australian anthropology were sidelined by this high-profile venture, and it came to be derided it as a populist extravagance. Yet the fact that the event exposes certain fault-lines in the politics of academia does not diminish – and arguably heightens – its significance to the history of science, anthropology and the visual arts. This was due to the unique accomplishments of its participants, and also to the Aboriginal people who shared their knowledge and provided practical support. Yet it was also due to the Expedition’s timing. It occurred at a moment when the very purpose of scientific and environmental research was being reconsidered.5 This was a moment when old disciplinary boundaries were up for reconsideration and ecological thinking was on the ascendant. The interdisciplinary makeup of the Expedition was intended to encourage cross-

4 Seibert to Secretary of State, 24 December 1948, Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Australia, Canberra Embassy, Confidential File 1948 RG 84, Box 16, National Archives and Records Administration [hereafter NARA], College Park, Maryland.
5 MacLeod 2000: 5.
pollination among the researchers, who returned from the Northern Territory with an array of data and new methodologies, and huge quantities of natural history specimens and Aboriginal artefacts, now held by major institutions in Australia and the United States.

Fig 1. Painters and wood carvers at work at Yirrkala making objects collected by the Arnhem Land Expedition, 1948.

Source: Photograph by Frank Setzler. Photo Lot 36, Drawer 8. By permission of the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution.

Beginnings

The Arnhem Land Expedition was led by Charles P Mountford (1890–1976), the Adelaide-based photographer and ethnologist. Although his star has waned in recent decades, ‘Monty’, as friend and foe alike knew him, was a well-known and at times controversial figure. At a time when Aboriginal people had little voice in public culture, he became a leading spokesman on matters Aboriginal. The press frequently sought his opinions, and he was adept at publicising himself and his activities. Mountford’s emergence as a scholar, photographer and filmmaker is a remarkable story. He had no academic qualifications in anthropology or anything else – a deficiency that irked some powerful gatekeepers, particularly the University of Sydney anthropologist Professor AP Elkin who immediately queried his credentials when the Expedition was announced in the Australian press.6

6 Elkin to Secretary of the National Geographic Society, 30 May 1945 (copy), Correspondence 1945–49, vol 1 1945–47, PRG 1218/17/4, American/Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land 1948 Records, State Library of South Australia [hereafter SLSA], Adelaide.
Mountford’s unsavoury encounters with academia were numerous. An oral history interview, recorded by Hazel de Berg in 1966, suggests they led to some residual bitterness.\(^7\) In part, the prejudice against Mountford reflected the class distinctions then very much alive in Australian society, for Mountford was ‘in trade’ rather than a profession. Born into impoverished circumstances in rural South Australia, he had only minimal schooling. By the age of ten, he was working with his father as a camera salesman. Later, the family moved to Adelaide where he became a tram conductor. Eventually, he attended evening courses and became qualified as a telephone mechanic. For many years, he worked in this capacity for the Department of the Postmaster General. Highly talented as a photographer, Mountford was encouraged by the Anthropological Society of South Australia and the South Australian Museum to document Aboriginal art sites around Adelaide. Norman B Tindale and Frederic Wood Jones were two figures, influential in Aboriginal studies, who gave him early support.\(^8\) Australian anthropology owed its origins to a circle of self-trained devotees that included AW Howitt, Lorimer Fison, RH Mathews, John Mathew and WE Roth. Mountford was a latter-day exemplar of this amateur tradition, though later in life he did receive academic recognition.

Mountford’s ethnological interests began to coalesce in the latter part of the 1920s when he participated in small-scale anthropological expeditions, organised from Adelaide. In the 1930s, he travelled through remote parts of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. He made early sound recordings of Aboriginal singers and developed an interest in traditional art forms. He took paper and crayons to several remote communities and encouraged knowledge-holders to express stories or dreamings in visual form. He became acquainted with the renowned watercolourist from Hermannsburg, Albert Namatjira, whom he depicted in a book and a documentary film (for which he was credited as associate producer).\(^9\) In 1940, he travelled for four months around Ayers Rock (Uluru) and the Olgas (Kata Tjuta), studying art and mythology. This resulted in the book *Brown Men and Red Sand* (1948) and a film of the same title.

Mountford’s extraordinary footage of the Centre, shot with Aboriginal family groups who were still living a predominantly nomadic lifestyle, had a direct bearing on the Arnhem Land Expedition. Towards the end of World War II, after a screening of his work in Canberra, Mountford came to the attention of Arthur Calwell, who was Minister for Information for much of the war. Calwell, who is best remembered as Chifley’s Minister for Immigration and as leader of the Australian Labor Party in the 1960s, was of Irish-Australian background. Sceptical of Australia’s historical attachment to the United Kingdom, he regarded the United States as the

\(^7\) Mountford in interview with Hazel de Berg, 28 October 1966, Hazel de Berg Collection, National Library of Australia Oral History Collection [hereafter NLAOHC], Oral DeB 189.

\(^8\) Lamshed 1972; Jones 2000.

\(^9\) Mountford 1944; Robinson 1947.
more progressive and egalitarian model of democracy. Ever eager to bolster his government’s profile with its wartime ally, he sent Mountford to the United States in 1945–46. His mission was to spread the good word about Australia in a series of film screenings and public lectures. It was neither the first nor the last occasion when white Australia would use images from Aboriginal culture to promote its political and national interests abroad.

Mountford gave presentations throughout the United States, but arguably the most significant occurred before the National Geographic Society in Washington DC where the audience numbered 4000. Among them was Dr Gilbert H Grosvenor, the society’s president, who is sometimes described as the ‘father of photojournalism’. For 55 years, he edited National Geographic, transforming it from an obscure, learned journal to the yellow-rimmed icon known throughout the world.10 Grosvenor invited Mountford to dinner at the Cosmos Club, the exclusive haunt of Washington’s scientific and cultural cognoscenti where the National Geographic Society had started in 1888. Grosvenor commissioned an article about Mountford’s experiences around Uluru and Kata Tjuta, published under the lurid title, ‘Earth’s Most Primitive People: A Journey with the Aborigines of Central Australia’.11 In his interview with de Berg, Mountford vividly recalled the evening with Grosvenor. When the latter mentioned that the National Geographic Society had a research fund, and asked if he had an idea worthy of support, Mountford responded: ‘I’ve got more ideas than a dog’s got fleas’.12 As discussions proceeded, it was the concept of an expedition to Arnhem Land that they settled upon, and with Grosvenor’s imprimatur, an initial grant of US$8500 was rapidly approved by the Society.13 The Arnhem Land Expedition was born.

The Expedition takes shape

Mountford had worked in Darwin before the war, but had never set foot in Arnhem Land. Through collections in the South Australian Museum, he became aware of the region’s richness in terms of art and other material culture – as we know from a paper on Arnhem Land paintings, collected by Norman Tindale and others, that Mountford published in 1939.14 Extending from the Gulf of Carpentaria, and bordered on its western flank by what is now Kakadu National Park, Arnhem Land is a vast terrain of 97,000 square

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10 Vosburgh 1966.
11 Mountford 1946.
12 Charles P Mountford in interview with Hazel de Berg, 28 October 1966, NLAOHC, Oral DeB 189.
13 $8500 was the initial amount sought in Mountford’s grant application and paid to the University of Adelaide which agreed to manage the funds on his behalf. The National Geographic Society allocated a further $1500 to meet in-house costs ‘such as photographic equipment and supplies … and contingencies’. Thomas McKnew to Alexander Wetmore, 3 September 1947, Arnhem Land Expedition file 178294, Accession Files RU 305, Smithsonian Institution Archives [hereafter SIA], Washington DC.
kilometres, classified as an Aboriginal reserve since 1931. In his application to the National Geographic Society, Mountford made much of the lack of contact between Arnhem Landers and the outside world.

Arnhem Land is an aboriginal reserve, and before the war, except for a few missions along the coast, was uninhabited by Europeans. The native culture was not at that time influenced by white civilisation; it is unlikely that the present military occupation has changed them, for the natives are not allowed near the camps.\(^{15}\)

This claim, as Mountford would discover, was completely erroneous. As the first line of defence against Japanese invasion, the northern coast had been flooded with military personnel. They did interact with Arnhem Landers, many of whom participated in the war effort. This is to say that the Pacific War, which had made the Expedition politically expedient, also had enormous impact upon the Aboriginal communities where the scientists worked and studied.

Mountford’s bid for funding proposed research into four aspects of Aboriginal life: the ‘Art of Bark Paintings’; the ‘Art of Body Paintings’; the ‘General Ethnology’ of the people; and ‘Music in Secular and Ceremonial life’. Scientific papers, photography, films and articles for National Geographic were among the intended outcomes. Mountford wrote his application in the first person and gave little indication of how many – if any – fellow travellers would partake in the adventure. He gave only faint hint that it might be more than a solo undertaking: ‘I would welcome the collaboration of other scientists, especially those interested in the life of the fauna and flora of the swamps or the coral reefs.’ This was the sole indication at this early stage that the expedition might segue from ethnological research to branches of the natural sciences.

**A trio of sponsors**

While the funding granted by the National Geographic Society was substantial for the period, it is probable that the Arnhem Land Expedition would have remained an essentially modest affair, involving Mountford and perhaps a few others, had it not caught the attention of another flagship organisation in Washington, the Smithsonian Institution (a huge complex of museums and research facilities). In the 1940s, under the leadership of Secretary Alexander Wetmore, the Smithsonian enjoyed an exceptionally close relationship with the National Geographic Society. Wetmore, a renowned ornithologist and field collector, was friendly with Grosvenor and served on National Geographic committees. Dogged by a limited travel budget for his staff, he was consistently amenable to suggestions

\(^{15}\) Application to Chairman of the Research Committee, National Geographic Society, 5 March 1945, Correspondence 1945–49, vol 1 1945–47, PRG 1218/17/4, American/Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land 1948 Records, SLSA.
for partnerships and joint ventures. Correspondence in the Smithsonian Archives suggests that it was Mountford who began to canvass the idea of recruiting some American scientists. Grosvenor supported him and brokered the contact with Wetmore.\(^\text{16}\) This resulted in Mountford visiting the Smithsonian to spruik his plans. Wetmore immediately discerned a strategic opportunity to correct the Institution’s under-representation in its Australian holdings. The Smithsonian’s decision to sign up as an official partner was undoubtedly influenced by the preparedness of the National Geographic Society to allocate a further $10,000 ‘to cover transportation, subsistence [sic] and incidental expenses’ incurred by the four scientists who would go to Arnhem Land. They were away from home for almost all of 1948.

From the outset, Grosvenor was attentive to the significance of the event in terms of international relations. Early in the planning process, he wrote to Sir Frederic Eggleston, then serving as Australian Minister to the United States, expressing his ultimate vision for the project.

I trust that your Government will be able to assist in this scheme, thus making it a joint Australian-United States research expedition. Such help will increase still further the links that already bind your Nation to ours, as well as add greatly to the scientific knowledge of this little-known part of your Continent.\(^\text{17}\)

Mountford was enthralled at the way his film and Aboriginal art project was snowballing. The joint involvement of two American icons, the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institution, ultimately proved too significant for Australian politicians to ignore. The government view, articulated by Eggleston, was that ‘a joint United States-Australian research expedition, such as this, will increase still further the links binding our respective countries’.\(^\text{18}\) Sensing a valuable diplomatic opportunity, Calwell arranged for the Commonwealth of Australia to sign up as the third official partner. He liaised with other branches of Government and won support, particularly from the armed services who agreed to fly the researchers between the major bases. Australia’s expenditure on staff, travel and equipment would rapidly eclipse the American commitment.

Two years after the Expedition was first announced, Mountford prepared a document for Grosvenor, stating the objectives as they now appeared.

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\(^{16}\) Grosvenor wrote: ‘In a conference with Mr. Mountford several days ago, he suggested adding several American scientists to the staff. We agreed, subject to your approval, that it is desirable that the additional scientists be selected by the Smithsonian Institution.’ Grosvenor to Wetmore, 25 October 1945, Arnhem Land Expedition file 178294, Accession Files RU 305, SIA.

\(^{17}\) Grosvenor to Eggleston (copy), 31 May 1945, Arnhem Land Expedition file 178294, Accession Files RU 305, SIA.

\(^{18}\) Eggleston to Grosvenor (copy), 11 June 1946, Correspondence 1945-9, vol 1 1945-47, PRG 1218/17/4, American/Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land 1948 Records, SLSA.
The original four point plan, dedicated to the study of Arnhem Land art, myth and music, had broadened into a nine point agenda, topped by some grandiose ambitions that were anything but specific to Arnhem Land.

(a) To establish a good neighbour policy and scientific cooperation between the United States of America and Australia.

(b) To provide publicity for Australia through the publication of three, if not four, illustrated articles in the National Geographic Magazine. (Circulation 1,250,000. Estimated Readers 5,000,000.)

(c) To study and record the aborigine’s pattern of life in relation to the terrestrial and marine fauna and flora.

(d) To investigate seasonal movements and shelter of the aborigines, and, by examination of their foods determine how well, or otherwise, they are able ‘to live off the land’.

(e) To make a nutritional health survey of the natives and their food as a guide for future administration.

(f) To collect and identify the plants, birds, animals and fish in the various environments of Arnhem Land.

(g) To carry out a fish survey along the coast of Arnhem Land.

(h) To determine the food resources of land and sea as data for future military operations. (This was urgently needed, but not available, during the last war.)

(i) To produce, for the National Film Board, five coloured cine films on the ethnology and natural history of Arnhem Land. 

These freshly minted objectives reflect the array of interests and institutions that had become involved in the two years since approval of National Geographic funding, and they provide a fairly realistic outline of what it set out to accomplish. In terms of the locations to be visited, Mountford now envisaged a multi-stop tour with Royal Australian Air Force planes transporting the researchers between five main bases: Groote Eylandt (‘An island environment with a distinctive ethnological culture’); the Anglican mission on Roper River (a ‘fresh water swamp land environment’); Melville Bay (‘air strip with ample accommodation and an outpost of the Department of Native Affairs’); Crocodile Island (Millingimbi) (‘Many aborigines practising a forest culture’); and Oenpelli (now Gunbalanya) (‘ethnology centres around unusual motifs in their art and elaborate ceremonies’).

19 Mountford to Grosvenor (copy), 28 January 1947, Arnhem Land Expedition file 178294, Accession Files RU 305, SIA.

20 Mountford to Grosvenor (copy), 28 January 1947, Arnhem Land Expedition file 178294, Accession Files RU 305, SIA.
As it transpired, this plan was too ambitious. The visit to Roper River was abandoned and instead of Melville Bay, the expeditioners established themselves at the Methodist mission of Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula. Millingimbi was never an Expedition base, although two researchers (Frederick McCarthy and Frank Setzler) made a side trip there while the rest of the party were at Yirrkala.

The participants

The Expedition was initially intended for 1947, but delays at both ends necessitated postponement. In terms of administrative complexity, the scale of the enterprise was well outside Mountford’s experience. One of the difficulties arising from having a triad of sponsors was a lack of say in the choice of personnel. From the moment the Expedition was announced in the press, Mountford was bombarded with applications from would-be expeditioners, offering services as cooks and anthropologists, doctors and errand runners – and much else in between. These letters reveal the rapidity with which the Arnhem Land Expedition captured the public imagination.21

Only two of these applicants won a spot on the Expedition. One was the cook and quartermaster John Bray who also served as honorary entomologist. The other was WE or Bill Harney, the Northern Territory patrol officer and bushman writer, who joined them in Yirrkala as official guide. Mountford already knew him, as did many other anthropologists who sought his local knowledge and contacts when brokering relationships with Aboriginal communities in the north. However, most of the Expedition participants, selected by the institutions that became stakeholders in the venture, were unknown to Mountford until they assembled in early 1948 and began the parade of receptions and send-offs that preceded their flight north to Darwin from Adelaide. In Australia, the main participating institutions were the Australian Museum in Sydney and the Institute of Anatomy in Canberra. On both sides of the Pacific, there had been argument about who should go, and it was only towards the end of 1947 that the final composition of the team was more or less established. With some turnover in support staff occurring during the Expedition, its official membership eventually numbered 17, listed as follows in the official Records:22

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21 Correspondence 1945–48, vol 2, PRG 1218/17/5, American/Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land 1948 Records, SLSA.
22 Mountford 1956: xi.
## List of staff on 1948 Expedition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Institutional Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charles P Mountford</td>
<td>Leader, Ethnologist and Film Director</td>
<td>Honorary Associate Curator in Ethnology, South Australian Museum, Adelaide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank M Setzler</td>
<td>Deputy Leader and Archaeologist</td>
<td>Head Curator, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert G Deignan</td>
<td>Ornithologist</td>
<td>Associate Curator of Birds, Smithsonian Institution, Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David H Johnson</td>
<td>Mammalogist</td>
<td>Curator of Mammals, Smithsonian Institution, Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert R Miller</td>
<td>Ichthyologist</td>
<td>Associate Curator of Fishes, Smithsonian Institution, Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond L Specht</td>
<td>Botanist</td>
<td>Lecturer, Department of Botany, University of Adelaide. (Specht held this position in 1956 when the first volume of the Records was published. At the time of the Expedition he had recently graduated from the University of Adelaide.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick D McCarthy</td>
<td>Anthropologist</td>
<td>Department of Anthropology, Australian Museum, Sydney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison Howell Walker</td>
<td>Photographer and Staff Writer</td>
<td>National Geographic Society, Washington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bessie I Mountford</td>
<td>Honorary Secretary</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William E Harney</td>
<td>Guide and Liaison Officer</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Bassett-Smith</td>
<td>Cine-Photographer</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith Cordon</td>
<td>Transport Officer</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John E Bray</td>
<td>Cook and Honorary Entomologist</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reginald Hollow</td>
<td>Cook</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Billington</td>
<td>Medical Officer</td>
<td>Institute of Anatomy, Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret McArthur</td>
<td>Nutritionist</td>
<td>Institute of Anatomy, Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelvin Hodges</td>
<td>Biochemist</td>
<td>Institute of Anatomy, Canberra</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mountford 1956: xi.

The list reveals a great deal about the Expedition and its milieu. To give the breakdown of nationalities, the team consisted of 12 Australians and five Americans. In terms of the fields of knowledge represented, the mix of professional scientists and writer-photographers set the tone for the range of outcomes – academic and popular – that was a distinctive trait of the Expedition. The gender imbalance is significant. The attendance of Mrs Bessie Mountford seems to been have a case of leader’s privilege. Wetmore had opposed the idea, telling Mountford ‘that ordinarily we did not favor taking women on trips of this kind.’\(^{23}\) The objection was overcome or ignored in Bessie’s case, but none of the

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\(^{23}\) Conversation with Mr. Mountford Regarding the Australian Expedition of 1947 (file note), 14 May 1946, Arnhem Land Expedition file 178294, Accession Files RU 305, SIA.
others was permitted to take a spouse. (Most of the younger researchers were, in any case, unmarried.) Still, Bessie Mountford made valuable contributions to the Expedition, but because they fell into areas traditionally deemed women’s labour, they were under-recognised. Mrs Monty, as they called her, was a former public servant and a skilled typist and bookkeeper. The meticulous Expedition archives, recording everything from emergencies to birthday greetings, were largely her doing.

Margaret McArthur, the other woman on the team, was anything but conventional. As Wetmore’s objection indicates, there were strong prejudices in the scientific establishment against the mixing of women and fieldwork. They were overcome in her case because anthropologists had come to realise that the sex of the investigator greatly affected the work they could do in the highly gendered society of Aboriginal Australia. McArthur was trained as a nutritionist, and had only recently returned from New Guinea where she had studied the diet and health of indigenous communities. Her mission in Arnhem Land was to carry out a pioneering investigation of the diet and food-gathering techniques of clans still living a traditional lifestyle. Since food gathering (as opposed to hunting) is predominantly female work, the bulk of her research was done with women and the young children in their care. So gender was at issue in the cross-cultural interactions, as it was in the Expedition’s internal dynamics, a point that is illustrated by McCarthy in some candid journal entries that appraise the personalities of his companions.

Setzler is straight-forward, all on the surface, but he is not firm enough with Monty. He is jolly & good company … His philosophy of life is fishing, food & sex (apart from his work) & his remarks about the latter to Margaret are too obvious to the whole company…

Miss Macarthur [sic] is an easy going type, who admits to being lazy and enjoys it, likes to swear a bit and generally exhibits a hard exterior typical of women careerists, but is really just the opposite. She is frank and has a keen mind ready to put Setzler in his place at any moment.24

Clearly, the Expedition made for complex politics in terms of gender, as the archaeologist Anne Clarke has also argued in an analysis of McCarthy, McArthur and Setzler’s scientific papers.25

The official list of personnel only hints at the range of people involved in the Expedition during its seven months in Arnhem Land, commencing in early April 1948. Some of the individuals who supported or visited them along the way are now regarded as iconic figures in Australian history. At Umbakumba on Groote Eylandt, their first base, they stayed in the Aboriginal settlement that had grown around the former Qantas depot, established before the war to refuel the Catalinas that flew the first regular service between Sydney and

24 McCarthy, 18 April 1948, Diary 1: Field Notes Groote Eylandt 1, Papers of Frederick David McCarthy, MS 3513/14/1, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
London. The settlement was presided over by Fred Gray, a former trepanger and all round adventurer who is rated as one of the legendary figures of the Northern Territory.26 In Yirrkala, their second base, the researchers were visited by the cartoonist Eric Jolliffe whose hilarious drawings of the scientists at work, published in Pix magazine, evoked the strangeness of their research and collecting, as it might have seemed to their Aboriginal hosts.

At Oenpelli, the third and final base, the Sydney journalist Colin Simpson joined forces with the Expedition. Formerly a newspaperman, Simpson was now working for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (now Corporation) (ABC) where he excitedly plunged into the emerging field of radio documentary. He was accompanied by technician Raymond Giles, the operator of a newfangled magnetic wire recorder (predecessor of the tape recorder). That the Arnhem Land Expedition stood proudly at the technological forefront is fully evident in its embrace of sound recording. The Expedition travelled with its own wire recorder, which Mountford put to use on Groote Eylandt where he recorded sacred song cycles. The Expedition’s documentation of Aboriginal music and of several major ceremonies is now recognised as being of enormous historical significance.

Activities, methods and controversy

The wire recorder, powered by large wet cell batteries, allowed the production of fairly high fidelity recordings of extended duration. The machine’s portability distinguished it from pre-war technology where location recording required a heavy truckload of equipment. The 1948 field recordings were a portent of the day when the tape recorder would become a basic tool of trade for the anthropologist.27 Simpson’s assignment at Oenpelli was to make a radio production about the Expedition, recorded in situ. This he did, and the program, broadcast in late 1948, consisted of Simpson’s crisp, first-person narrative, set against a backdrop of magnificent nature recordings, song performances and interviews with Mountford and other scientists. Considered a classic radio feature, the production survives in ABC Archives. Simpson went beyond mere reportage during his time in Arnhem Land. While the anthropologists filmed and photographed, he made an extended sound recording of the Wubarr ceremony, a male initiation rite, traditional to the Bininj (as the clans of West Arnhem Land are collectively known). Cultural sensitivities prevented the broadcast of this recording, although it survives in the archive. For the senior men of West Arnhem Land it provides an invaluable record of a venerated ceremony that has now fallen into abeyance.

Simpson wrote about his Arnhem Land experience in Adam in Ochre (1951), the bestseller that marked his transformation from journalist to globetrotting writer of travel books. To the contemporary reader, Adam in Ochre might seem a suspect

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27 Thomas 2007a.
title, but its influence in transforming attitudes to Aboriginal Australians was profound. Simpson was intrigued by Margaret McArthur’s realisation that far from being impoverished, the hunter-gatherer diet was nutritionally sound. The impoverishment, he argued, existed on the missions and cattle stations that exploited Aboriginal labour. This he regarded as a national disgrace and as a breach of Australia’s human rights obligations. Informed by the internationalism of the post-war moment, Simpson cited UNESCO data that put paid to the assumption that there were biological differences, or variations in intelligence levels, between the races of humanity.\(^{28}\) He castigated the indifference of white Australia to its black population, and cited recent population data to debunk the ‘dying race theory’. He argued, correctly, that the Aboriginal population was actually increasing.\(^{29}\)

Fig 2. Deputy Leader of the Expedition, Frank M Setzler (left), and Australian Museum anthropologist Frederick D McCarthy camped on Winchelsea Island in 1948.

Source: Photograph by Frank Setzler. Photo Lot 36, Drawer 7. By permission of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives.

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\(^{29}\) Simpson 1951: 186.
Simpson’s book is rewarding reading, vivid in its portraiture of the Expedition’s personalities and how they spent their days building up collections and data. For a sense of its research output, the four-volume *Records of the American–Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land* (1956–64) provide, in their 2000 pages, a panoramic overview of the range of work completed. Volume 1 is *Art, Myth and Symbolism*, written solely by Mountford. It and the succeeding volumes detail a herculean labour in terms of collection. The bounty included 13,500 plant specimens, 30,000 fish, 850 birds, 460 other animal specimens, and several thousand Aboriginal artefacts and paintings. To these can be added the films, sound recordings and thousands of photographs. Paperwork generated by the Expedition, including field journals and letters home to colleagues and loved ones, provides a multitude of perspectives on the researchers’ interactions with Aboriginal people and each other. Most of the fauna collections are held by the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History. Sets of plant specimens, laboriously preserved by Raymond Specht, were lodged with leading herbaria within Australia and overseas.

The journals of Mountford, Setzler and McCarthy reveal that something of a ‘turf war’ developed among the anthropologists. The interpersonal tensions, almost inevitable during fieldwork of such duration, were worsened in the early, formative days by the stranding on a reef near Millingimbi of the *Phoenix*, a dilapidated barge that was hired to transport most of the equipment. This limited the scientific work that could be done during the first phase of the Expedition, and was the prime reason for abandoning the planned base at Roper River. Rumblings of discontent reached Canberra, to the extent that Kevin Murphy, Calwell’s Director of Information, saw fit to fly to Yirrkala and pay the Expedition a surprise visit. With him were AR Driver, the Administrator of the Northern Territory, and American Consul Seibert, then in the middle of his northern tour. The purpose of the visit was to sack Mountford from the leadership and install Setzler in his place. After deliberation among the Americans, however, Setzler declined the promotion. According to Mountford’s biographer, Max Lamshed, the Smithsonian naturalists, at the urging of Herbert Deignan, decided that a local must lead an expedition on Australian soil. So Mountford remained in the executive role.30

The attempted deposing of Mountford is too complex a story, told from too many points of view in the primary sources, to deal with here in its entirety. Unsurprisingly, Mountford was humiliated by the incident and it cast a long shadow over the remainder of his time in Arnhem Land. Seibert’s report on the incident is worthy of brief consideration, for it shows how the Expedition was being scrutinised from afar, and it clears up the question, raised by his presence, of whether there was backing in Washington for the demotion. On the latter point, Seibert is very clear. Until briefed by the Australians, he was unaware that relations on the Expedition were ‘not happy’. He intentionally remained out of earshot while Mountford and Setzler were in conference with the two

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bureaucrats. He was there as an onlooker only, though it is possible that Driver and Murphy used his presence to strengthen their case. Seibert’s perception of the situation was based on Australian intelligence and brief discussions with the American scientists. Thus informed, he relayed a blunt assessment to his masters in Washington.

I gathered that Mr. Mountford, who apparently is at best an amateur anthropologist but an excellent photographer, was supposed by the Department of Information to be devoting himself principally to photography but was actually working chiefly on anthropology. It appears that he had had no experience in planning, organizing and leading an expedition of such size; had neither any conception of the preparatory work to be done in the 6 months he was given for the purpose nor anything like sufficient local knowledge; and was unaware of his own limitations … It appears that his leadership was weak, vacillating [sic], arbitrary, and characterized by bad judgement, and that he would take advantage of his position to enlist, at each camp, an unfair proportion of the available natives in his particular phase of activity, to the detriment of the scientific work of the other members of the party … It appears that for about a fortnight after our visit Mr. Mountford’s leadership was better, but that he then relapsed into his former ways.31

The worst relations were between Mountford and McCarthy. The latter, in Mountford’s mind, bore the taint of Elkin, since he had studied under him at the University of Sydney and worked for the Australian Museum where Elkin was a trustee. Mountford suspected that McCarthy was responsible for leaking unfavourable reports on his leadership to the Canberra bureaucracy, but there is no evidence for this. Disaffection with Mountford was shared by many on the Expedition. Murphy’s intelligence came from FW Clements, Director of the Institute of Anatomy, who had received a relentless flow of unflattering reports on Mountford from Brian Billington, the Expedition doctor.32 To some degree, the crossovers in their work can explain the disagreement between McCarthy and Mountford. Unlike the naturalists, who represented discrete disciplines, there was much more likelihood of the anthropologists treading on each other’s toes. Setzler and McCarthy managed to navigate these difficulties, entering into a sometimes uneasy alliance. Although Setzler did not share McCarthy’s interest in direct ethnographic research (resulting in his important documentation of string figures at Yirrkala), they willingly worked together on archaeological digs. They enjoyed a fruitful collaboration on their side trip to Millingimbi, divorced from the stresses of Mountford and the larger party. McCarthy and Setzler maintained a long correspondence after the Expedition that reveals on both sides a great deal of rancour towards Mountford.33 The editing of the official Records, the fate

31 Seibert to Secretary of State, 24 December 1948. Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Australia, Canberra Embassy, Confidential File 1948 RG 84, Box 16, NARA.
32 Correspondence in file titled ‘Survey Arnhem Land 1947–8’, Institute of Anatomy Records, Series No A2644/1, Item 50/11 Section 1, National Archives of Australia, Canberra.
33 General Correspondence 1949 A-Q and General Correspondence 1950, Frank Maryl Setzler Papers 1927–1960, Boxes 7 and 8, National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.
of the ethnological collections, and the films arising from the Expedition were all subjects of disagreement. Mountford was particularly protective of his art study which involved the commission of hundreds of paintings on bark and paper from artists at all the main locations visited. As the archaeologist Sally K May has shown in her study of the paintings and other artefacts, the carve-up of the ethnological collections among sponsoring institutions was deeply political, and marked a further breakdown in the ‘friendly mission’ sentiments, espoused in the Expedition publicity. The Australian Museum and the Smithsonian acquired the lion’s share of paintings and also an extraordinary array of Arnhem Land artefacts, including baskets, fish nets, weapons and ceremonial objects. The National Museum of Australia also has significant holdings, as do Australia’s six state art galleries.

Fig 3. Mininyala Wubulkarra of the Mandjikay clan (left) and Ngulurru of the Djambarrpuynu clan making twined objects outside a humpy on Millingimbi Island in 1948. The child is Djakala Garrawurra. Identification by Joe Neparrnga Gumbula in interview with Louise Hamby.

Source: Photograph by Frank Setzler. Photo Lot 36, Drawer 8. By permission of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives.

34 May 2009.
Indigenous responses

How the Aboriginal communities responded to the visitation of scientists is less easy to assess. In its favour, the Expedition arrived with a definite interest in the people and their way of life. This was definitely not the case with many of the Balanda – as white people are known throughout Arnhem Land – whom they typically encountered. The researchers upheld the art, ceremonies and traditional modes of sustenance as valid and important. In this, they differed markedly from the missionaries on Groote and at Oenpelli who were bitterly determined to stamp out ‘heathen’ customs. Moreover, the Expedition brought with it substantial resources that were distributed in exchange for assistance. Howell Walker’s photographs and films document some of the economic exchanges. A National Geographic Society lecture film on the Expedition shows Mountford distributing small blocks of tobacco, the major commodity of trade between Arnhem Landers and Balanda. Still photographs reveal distribution of other goods such as cloth, sewing kits and scissors. The Expedition records show that painters, weavers, carriers and guides were all paid for their services.

This is not to deny that there were detrimental aspects to the Expedition. The medical researchers pricked and prodded their subjects. They took samples of blood, breast milk and excrement for analysis. Frank Setzler, a protégé of the Smithsonian’s Aleš Hrdlička (a founding figure in American physical anthropology) collected hair samples, fingerprints and made facial casts. There was much that was intrusive and even more that was perplexing. The taking of stool samples was deeply problematic: associated with sorcery in Aboriginal culture. The fact that the Expedition brokered so many cooperative relationships at its three bases, and on its many side trips, suggests a basic willingness to share culture and participate in the education of the visitors. But in some respects, the loyalty was tested. The most controversial aspect of the Expedition’s work – certainly by today’s standards – was Setzler’s collection of human bones from mortuary caves and other sites. Nearly all ended up at the Smithsonian Institution, ostensibly on loan. In 2008, at the request of the Australian Government, the Smithsonian returned about two thirds of the Aboriginal human remains to their communities of origin.35 In 2010 the Smithsonian released the remaining third to a delegation of traditional owners and they have now been returned to Australia.

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35 The Expedition also excavated several graves of trepangers from Macassar who had died on the coast of Arnhem Land. These remains are still in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of Natural History.
Fig 4. Charles P Mountford distributing payment at Yirrkala during Arnhem Land Expedition in 1948. Margaret Djuwandayngu Yunupingu has identified a number of people in the photograph. Wandjuk Marika is the man seated with hand on his head. Yama Munugritja, wearing a loin cloth, stands behind him. Madjidi Wanambi is the man seated to the right of Wandjuk. To his right is Mathaman Marika.

Source: Photograph by Howell Walker. Slide box 111. By permission of National Geographic Stock.

Unfortunately, many of the people who posed in photographs were not identified. This is also the case with Aborigines of the Sea Coast (1950), Arnhem Land (1950) and Birds and Billabongs (1951), the three Expedition films from Australia, released by the Commonwealth Film Unit. The language barriers were considerable and even the transcriptions of names posed problems. Mountford’s documentation of artists’ names is patchy, and the identities of weavers, fibre workers and toolmakers are, in many cases, lost forever. However, some people who worked with the Expedition were identified, and a few became prominent in later years. Yolngu man Mawalan Marika, recognised as one of the greatest painters of north-east Arnhem Land, worked with the Expedition and contributed to the collection of paintings. His son Wandjuk Marika (1927–1987) was also a painter, but achieved particular prominence as a Yolngu leader and spokesman. A compelling advocate for Aboriginal art, he sat on government committees and was one of the forces behind the Bark Petition, a powerful and historically significant protest against the establishment of bauxite mining at Gove.36 Thanks to the Methodist missionaries at Yirrkala, the young Wandjuk

was fluent in English by the time the Expedition arrived in mid-1948. As chief translator, he was at the centre of negotiations between Mountford’s mob and his own people.

On Groote Eylandt Gerald Blitner (1920–2008) played a similar role. As a child of mixed race heritage, he was taken at the age of four from the mission at Roper River on the mainland to Groote Eylandt. There he was educated at the special ‘half-caste’ mission, run by the Christian Missionary Society. By 1948, he was working for Fred Gray on the other side of the island, and in this capacity he became translator and guide to the Expedition. About six months before his death, I interviewed him for the National Library of Australia, and he talked at length about his response, and that of the Umbakumba community, to the visiting scientists. This is the most extensive record of the Expedition from an Aboriginal perspective. Blitner believed that Mountford had been too headstrong in his quest for information, particularly that of a secret-sacred nature. But for the most part Blitner was sanguine about the 1948 experience, emphasising how much he learnt about the ways of white people from his involvement. Blitner went on to have a varied career that included crocodile shooting, captaincy of a small boat, and retailing.37 In the 1980s, he served as chairman of the Northern Land Council, a central position in Aboriginal politics. The leadership roles played by both Marika and Blitner are indicative of their ability to represent

Aboriginal culture to a wider populace. Blitner’s own testimony suggests that the Expedition, alongside other experiences, helped in the development of this intercultural dexterity. This was part of a broader pattern that helps explain Arnhem Landers’ receptivity to the Expedition. Here was an opportunity for them to learn about Balanda, while Balanda learned about them.38

Some critics would argue that the Arnhem Land Expedition was essentially concerned with the appropriation of Aboriginal culture by white Australians and Americans. Here is yet another example of the way ‘the West’ has manipulated ‘the Rest’ for its own purposes. Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins have said as much about National Geographic in an influential critique of the magazine.39 Persuasive as their argument is, it is somewhat complicated by experiences such as mine with Gerry Blitner. So often the postcolonial critique is as oblivious to the perspective of the colonised person as the thing it criticises. When I showed Blitner Mountford’s extensive article on the Expedition, published in National Geographic in late 1949, he was dismayed that despite his contribution as guide and interpreter, there was no photograph of him. This was far more concerning than the article’s politically incorrect title, ‘Exploring Stone Age Arnhem Land’.40 His disappointment was somewhat assuaged by film footage I showed him, taken by Howell Walker with whom he developed a warm relationship.41 With cries of delight, he watched himself as a muscular 28 year old, engrossed in the business of skinning a crocodile. His response to the film footage is evidence of the sort of ownership Arnhem Landers feel towards the photography, sound recordings and artefacts amassed in 1948. They inevitably see them as their cultural property. On several occasions I have gone to locations visited by the Expedition and experienced the warmth with which movie and audio footage is received by descendant communities. This work of taking things back to their place of origin has provided important opportunities to identify locations and individuals, and to allow people to engage with how their forebears did things 60 years ago.42 Invariably, the photographic and audio records are identified as important aspects of the local culture, pleasurable to experience and redolent with possibilities for educating young people about how things were done in earlier days. The people with whom I spoke were hyper-attentive to the way their relatives acted for the camera or recorder. They were highly discerning in their appreciation of the singing and dancing. People in Yirrkala, when explaining the motivations of those who were documented so long ago, interpreted the films and recordings as gifts, left by their forebears for future generations.

These responses to the historic material are suggestive of how the people of Arnhem Land engaged with the technological opportunities offered by the Expedition. Colin Simpson left a detailed account of this, describing the

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38 Thomas 2011.
40 Mountford 1949.
41 Walker 1949.
42 Thomas 2007b.
excitement with which singers listened back to their recordings. He related how
an Oenpelli man named Marawana, a brilliant didgeridoo player, monitored his
work and re-recorded when he detected a mistake.43 If looking for antecedents
to such remarkable collaborations as the film *Ten Canoes* (2006), directed by
Rolf de Heer in association with the Yolngu community at Ramingining, the
historical importance of this early documentary-making can be discerned.44
The 1948 material is the antithesis of ‘fly on the wall’ filmmaking. Rather, it
is the documentation of premeditated performances of aspects of the culture;
performances that came about as a consequence of negotiations and exchanges.
So it is not surprising that in the larger regional centres of Arnhem Land, people
are doing their utmost to claw back documentation of their own kin and make
it accessible in digital form. In Yirrkala, the local community has launched the
Mulka Project, a digital knowledge centre that makes film, photos and sound
recordings from archives around the world immediately accessible to traditional
owners.45 Expedition material is among the huge array of data that have been
added to the Mulka Project’s ever-expanding archive.

The continuing legacy

The enduring relevance of the Expedition to the people of Arnhem Land raises
broader questions about its significance and legacy. Colin Simpson judiciously
observed that:

[w]hat it accomplished is said to have been scientifically considerable,
but is not measurable now, and perhaps never will be. Such findings
take years to write and codify and publish and disseminate. When that
is completed, the use of them is only at a beginning.46

The fact that Aboriginal people are taking ownership of the documentation is
an example of how consequences can defy intentions. When the Expedition
was conceived, no one argued that the subjects of study might one day be
beneficiaries of it. At that time the narrative of racial decline was so compelling
that even its greatest skeptics had difficulty thinking beyond it. In his original
grant application, Mountford claimed that Aboriginal painting must be studied
urgently ‘because the art is disappearing rapidly’. Yet as it turned out, the
reverse happened. Oenpelli and Yirrkala have thriving art movements. There,
and in other parts of Arnhem Land, painting remains a favored occupation.
A deeply social activity that occurs *within* the community (unlike many other
types of employment), it affirms the ancient stories and traditions while opening
opportunity for new thinking and ideas. In these localities where poverty is
endemic, it constitutes an important stream of income.

44 Thomas 2010.
46 Simpson 1951: 40.
When considering the fairly healthy state of Arnhem Land’s art production, it is only fair to acknowledge that Mountford’s collection of paintings, at a time when they were barely recognised as art, played a substantial role in inculcating the interest and connoisseurship on which the contemporary Aboriginal art market depends. His extensive publications, popular and scholarly, and the placement of Expedition paintings in flagship institutions, had significant influence on the international profile of Aboriginal painting. The dispersal of the Commonwealth’s share of the 1948 paintings was particularly important. Since there was at that time no national museum of art or natural history, it was decided in 1956 to distribute the works among Australia’s six state galleries. This is seen as a watershed moment, since it marked the admissibility of Aboriginal paintings to the major fine art institutions. Previously they had been treated as ethnological ‘specimens’ in museums. With the benefit of a long-term perspective, the Arnhem Land Expedition can be seen as a venture that opened all sorts of conduits for the survival and recognition of Aboriginal culture in the modern era. This occurred in spite of the fact that Mountford, its instigator, was for the most part an adherent to an old school notion of ‘salvage’ anthropology, ever determined to gather the surviving fragments of what was, to him, a vanishing world.

It might be asked why this grand event, reported avidly in its day, faded from public memory. Could it be that the rather nineteenth-century concept of a scientific expedition began to look dated? Certainly, the anthropological establishment, which was snubbed and sidelined by Mountford’s appointment as leader, did all in its power to diminish it. Ronald Berndt, Elkin’s loyal acolyte, was nothing less than vitriolic in his review of *Art, Myth and Symbolism*. Elkin himself said of the Expedition, ‘I see Mountford is busily discovering things that have been known for years.’ Yet it can also be argued that the Expedition ceased to be noticed because much of what it pioneered became commonplace. Scores of filmmakers and photographers have followed in its footsteps. In 1949 Elkin himself teamed up with the poet and ABC broadcaster John Thompson to document songs and ceremonies at Mainoru, just south of the Arnhem Land border – an ABC collaboration uncannily reminiscent of Mountford’s work with Simpson. Writing of the broader disciplinary intersections, Anne Clarke positions the Arnhem Land Expedition as ‘a precursor of more recent, multi-disciplinary research projects such as the Kakadu Archaeological Project of the early 1980s.’ Mountford’s technique of eliciting narratives on rock art from local guide-cum-artists is now standard practice in the many rock art studies occurring in Arnhem Land and elsewhere. His career as an autodidact in rock art scholarship provided raw data – and inspiration – to later workers in this mould such as George Chaloupka.

49 Berndt 1958.
51 See Elkin 1972.
52 Clarke 1998: 15.
The Expedition pursued a catholic range of inquiries, but the fact that it roved so widely through various locations resulted in a lack of in-depth ethnography at any one place. In particular, the meagerness of its contribution to kinship study rendered it uninteresting to anthropologists of the 1950s and 1960s. This has now turned around with the emergence of visual anthropology and renewed interest in museology. Collections of museum objects are fuelling new types of historical investigation, while ethnographic film and photography are now acknowledged as important primary records, rather than interesting ephemera. Yet there were aspects of the 1948 research that profoundly affected anthropological theory, none more so than McArthur’s time and motion studies of food-gathering activities at Fish Creek and Hemple Bay. This research was published in a paper titled ‘The Food Quest and the Time Factor in Aboriginal Economic Life’ that she co-authored with McCarthy. It rapidly became prescribed reading for first year anthropology students in many parts of the world. The findings were arresting because they challenged the long-held Western assumption that hunter-gatherers invariably lead lives of unmerciful toil, a ceaseless ‘struggle for existence’. In contradiction to the received wisdom, the ‘Food Quest’ paper argued that the labour of meeting daily food needs was dispensed with fairly quickly, so that clans in Arnhem Land had ample time to spend with their children, devote to cultural activities, or otherwise pass as they pleased.

Among those intrigued and influenced by the findings was the Chicago anthropologist, Marshall Sahlins, now regarded as one of the most influential voices in the discipline. So ‘startling’ did he find the Expedition data that he insisted they ‘must provoke some review of the Australian reportage going back for over a century, and perhaps revision of an even longer period of anthropological thought’. The Arnhem Land work was a catalyst for Sahlins’ idea of the ‘original affluent society’, a theory that shifted anthropological debate since it argued against notions of primitivism and instead proposed that the hunter-gatherer lifestyle was a sophisticated response to its environment, designed to satisfy the needs and welfare of the entire community.

As for the United States–Australia relationship, can we say that it was strengthened or even influenced by the ‘friendly mission’ in Arnhem Land? That would be a bold claim, given the scale of the global realignments occurring at that formative moment. Yet we can say safely that the Expedition was a microcosm of sorts. In the coolness of that early Cold War moment, it set the tone for what was sayable and unsayable in the relationship between Canberra and Washington, as the redoubtable Consul Seibert revealed in the conclusion to his classified report on the troubles of the Arnhem Land Expedition.

I received long-distance-telephone inquiries from the press from as far away as Sydney on the subject of the rumoured rift (to which I replied in tenor directly contrary to the truth), and doubtless the others concerned were likewise quizzed, but, so far as I know, not a hint of the true
situation appeared in print. The expedition was subjected to numerous social and official entertainments in Adelaide, which were marked by an atmosphere of unadulterated sweetness and light. Mr Setzler and the other Americans, like the Australians, made themselves extremely popular during their two short stays in South Australia, and I had every reason to be proud of them.\textsuperscript{56}

Fig 6. Barge transporting equipment and collections down the East Alligator River at the end of the Expedition in November 1948.

Source: Photograph by Frank Setzler. Photo Lot 36, Drawer 8. By permission of the Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives.

\textsuperscript{56} Seibert to Secretary of State, 24 December 1948, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Australia, Canberra Embassy, Confidential File 1948 RG 84, Box 16, NARA.
Acknowledgments

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Aboriginal Enterprises: negotiating an urban Aboriginality

Sylvia Kleinert

In 1952 long time political activist Bill Onus used compensation from a road accident to establish Aboriginal Enterprises, a tourist outlet in Belgrave, on the outskirts of Melbourne. Employing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers Aboriginal Enterprises manufactured artefacts and furnishings, imported bark paintings and didjeridus from Arnhem Land and sold a range of other small objects. At a time when assimilation policies expected Aborigines to adopt the ideals and values of white Australians, Aboriginal Enterprises offered a model for cultural maintenance that began to rebuild pride in Aboriginality, contributing toward a new urban Aboriginal presence in Melbourne. Yet despite its success, Aboriginal Enterprises is almost completely overlooked in the history of Aboriginal art in south-eastern Australia. With colonisation Aboriginal people in south-eastern Australia were incorporated within the uneven power relations of a settler society. From the outset they engaged in barter and trade, drawing from their own cosmologies, stories and histories and selectively incorporating from colonial genres. For Aboriginal people, participation in tourism through the production of artefacts and cultural performances was an expression of continuing attachment to their own culture often carried out in opposition to government policies of assimilation. However the narrowly ethnographic concerns of museums viewed the stylistic hybridity and commodification of these objects as evidence of acculturation and cultural decline. This scholarly response imposed an enforced silence on the history of Aboriginal art in the south-east such that, even today, a lacunae exists from the drawings of William Barak and Tommy McRae in the late nineteenth century to the emergence of a contemporary ‘urban’ Aboriginal artistic expression in the 1970s and 1980s – a period of silence that coincides precisely with the implementation of assimilation policies aimed at rendering Aborigines invisible.

By considering the cultural production of Aboriginal Enterprises in the light of recent debates in cross cultural discourse and the wider socio-political context of colonisation, this paper intervenes in this apparent historical absence to argue for a dynamic and resilient presence in south-eastern Australia. My research

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1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the AIATSIS National Indigenous studies conference, ‘Perspectives on urban life: connections and reconnections’, 29 September–1 October 2009. In this paper I draw upon doctoral research undertaken in the south-east and I acknowledge the contribution of Lin Onus, Alma Toomath, Albert Mullett, Bindi Williams and Paula Kerry. This paper has benefited from the insightful comments provided by two anonymous referees.
shows that for ethnic minorities entangled in colonial power relationships, the visibility politics of tourism provides a critical insight into the representation and recognition of Aboriginal identities within the wider framework of the nation state. The ambiguities and tensions that arise around issues of authenticity and tradition as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike engage in processes of collaboration, adaptation and appropriation suggest the saliency of this study to postcolonial debates on tourist art.

Tourism and commodities in a postcolonial world

Tourist art can be seen as a new mode of production that arose in response to the incorporation of Indigenous people within the globalising forces of colonisation. Worldwide, it is argued, the cultural production of Indigenous communities expanded in response to their historical experiences and the changing interests of colonisers. In Australia Aboriginal tourism has its origins in nineteenth and twentieth century missions and reserves such as Ramahyuck (Lake Wellington), Coranderrk and Lake Tyers in Victoria and La Perouse in Sydney where developments in transport allowed ease of access for recreational visitors from nearby cities. Tourism held a range of meanings for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike: for Aboriginal people participation in tourism represented an important means of ‘keeping culture’; for visitors tourism met the desire for an encounter with a primitive other. Nevertheless Aboriginal people and their culture cannot be disassociated from wider debates on race, representation and colonisation. Tourism was, and is, a complex and contested arena of cultural practice. While it can be shown that participation in tourism is beneficial to indigenous people, it is also consistently misrepresented through the artificiality of the tourist encounter as evidence of colonial domination. In seeking to reconsider the role of tourist art within contemporary debates on cross cultural discourse and the politics of cultural identity, it is important to understand how Aboriginal art has been evaluated and the means by which Aboriginal people have mediated these inscriptions to negotiate a place in modern world.

Recent studies in cross cultural discourse draw attention to the way in which Indigenous art has been evaluated and inscribed within western paradigms. As Nicholas Thomas explains, the ironies and contradictions that arise in the process of recognition for Aboriginality can be seen a part of the ‘interplay of dispossession and repossession that defines the history of settler societies’. Ambiguously placed in relation to the nation state, Aboriginal people are constructed through colonial ideologies as part of a distant past or remote

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4 ‘Keeping culture’ is a term commonly used by many Aboriginal people to describe their engagement in cultural practice implying both cultural maintenance and political determination.
5 Thomas 1999: 12.
present. Since the first serious studies of [Aboriginal culture] began in the late nineteenth century [Thomas argues] scholars and connoisseurs have generally paid attention only to pieces they regarded as traditional: new forms of Aboriginal art incorporating from colonial genre, styles and techniques – ‘often made as tourist souvenirs’ – were denigrated as evidence of cultural decline and commodification. The belief on the part of Baldwin Spencer, Honorary Director of Museum Victoria (1898–1928) that there were no surviving traditions in the south-east created a growing concern with authenticity on the part of curators ensuring that, from the 1920s onwards, Museum Victoria ceased collecting artefacts from the south-east. As Indigenous writer and artist Julie Gough notes, ‘generations of hiatus followed for Aboriginal people’. Incorporated within discriminatory legislation enacted in the late nineteenth century ‘[i]ndigenous presence was remodelled in the popular imagination as inexplicable ghosted absence … a precursor for what would proceed nationally’. In the meantime, cultural constructions of Aboriginality privileged ‘real’ Aborigines in northern Australia over Aboriginal people in the south-east who were seen to have ‘lost’ their culture.

Over the past three or four decades much has changed through the political efforts of Aboriginal people. Aboriginal art is now critically acclaimed, represented in private and public collections of museums and galleries in Australia and overseas – no longer seen as ‘primitive art’ but as contemporary Indigenous art. And its success as a multi-million dollar industry brings recognition not just for the work of individual artists but Aboriginal culture is also a primary focus of attention for international tourism. Today there is growing recognition for the vitality and dynamism of Aboriginal people and culture and the many complex factors at work in cross cultural exchange generally. Where earlier tourist research gave undue emphasis to the consumer, local studies examine tourism from an Indigenous perspective. Bennetta Jules-Rosette argues that, as a semiotic sign system, tourist art has its own structural integrity ‘both triggered by and autonomous of the consumer response’. As Howard Morphy notes, the cultural production of Aboriginal people is able to fulfil multiple roles (both internal and external) thereby calling into question western categories that differentiate fine art/craft, art/ artefact, high art/popular culture. Indeed it seems that the artificial nature of the encounter between Aboriginal people and tourists far from determining visitors’ expectations of Indigenous people as ‘primitive, orderly or doomed’, as evidence of superficiality or domination, may in fact act as a ‘screen’ from closer, more invasive scrutiny thereby leaving valued customs protected. In seeking

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7 Thomas 1999: 15.
8 Kleinert 1994: 43.
11 Langton 1981.
13 Jules-Rosette 1984: 5.
15 Lydon 2005: 205.
to retrieve recognition for the cultural production of Aboriginal Enterprises, this paper draws upon substantive Aboriginal histories of the south-east by writers such as Bain Attwood, Diane Barwick, Julie Gough, Jane Lydon, Maria Nugent and myself. In these studies Aboriginal identity is no longer seen in fixed, essentialising terms but as complicated and contingent, ‘subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power.’ And in contrast to those who misrepresent tourist art as evidence of colonial domination and cultural commodification, these writers highlight the agency of Aboriginal people in the process of cultural exchange. Jane Lydon’s study of Coranderrk notes that ‘A crucial aspect of the “[Aboriginal] residents” political savvy and their ability to manipulate public debate … was their self-conscious understanding of how they were represented in white discourse.’ From this model Lydon suggests that encounters between Aboriginal people and tourists can be seen in performative terms as a successful assertion of presence that maintained social cohesion and might also provide a means of status and income.

In this paper I build on and expand these insights moving from an earlier, more restricted historical engagement with tourism on Aboriginal reserves to consider more urbanised, collective initiatives that developed in the context of political transformations taking place in Aboriginal communities in the 1950s and 1960s.

This paper focuses on one particular site of tourist production: Aboriginal Enterprises and its place in a history of domestic tourism in Australia. Obviously my study cannot be inclusive: Aboriginal Enterprises is one of many such initiatives occurring at this time each emerging from particular historical circumstances and with its own distinctive trajectory. Rather I use this paper to consider the radical shifts taking place in the 1950s and 1960s with the increased migration of Aboriginal people into capital cities and the ensuing dialectic between colonial dispossession and the restoration and renewal of cultural identities. Most particularly I am concerned with the place of tourism as a ‘meeting ground’ wherein both Indigenous and non-Indigenous are involved in processes of adaptation, incorporation and collaboration – and are changed in the process. The visibility politics of tourism operated in ways that enabled Aboriginal Enterprises to establish a paradigm for a dynamic urban Aboriginal presence that began to negotiate the binarism of an ancient culture in a modern world.

17 Hall 1990: 225.
18 See, for example MacCannell 1992; Culler 1988. In the Australian context the pessimism of some commentators misrepresents all Aboriginal art as evidence of colonial domination and commodification (Fry and Willis 1989).
21 Thomas 1999.
Aboriginal enterprise in the city

For over 15 years from 1952 to 1968, Aboriginal Enterprises provided an important outlet for Aboriginal art and craft in the Melbourne region. Established by Bill Onus (1906–1968) a member of the Wiradjir Aboriginal nation and a passionate political activist, Aboriginal Enterprises enabled art, as a form of social action, to mobilise culture in the realisation of a political agenda. While the national goal of assimilation implemented by the Commonwealth Minister for Territories Paul Hasluck championed regulated progress toward assimilation by means of controlled steps to citizenship, Indigenous leaders like Bill Onus and Doug Nicholls – two leading spokesmen of the era – rejected the absorptionist elements in this doctrine. Instead, Onus and Nicholls declared their commitment to fight for the survival of Aborigines as a distinct group. During the 1950s and 1960s both Onus and Nicholls pursued their agenda through the various forums provided by Aboriginal organisations to articulate their political concerns. As Bain Attwood’s archival research reveals, in 1957 Onus developed a programme for the Australian Aborigines’ League in which he articulated a desire to promote cultural renewal and reawaken Aboriginal pride. In the section headed ‘Retaining Our Identity as Aboriginals’ Onus said:

We wish to emphasize that although overcome by the white community and subjugated for close on 170 years that we have never completely surrendered our ways nor accepted yours. We still reverence many of our ancient traditions. Even right here in Melbourne, we still are Aborigines at heart...

Onus’s cultural strategy had a dual role: to nurture a sense of community spirit among Aborigines through a conscious revival of continuing ancient traditions and to gain recognition for the achievements of Aborigines. More generally the political programmes developed by Onus and Nicholls sought equality for Aboriginal people. However, discriminatory legislation enacted in the late nineteenth century meant that it was ‘politically disadvantageous’ for them to

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22 For a biography of Bill Onus see Kleinert 2009.
23 In recent years assimilation has generated considerable scholarly debate both as an idea and in relation to its policy and practice from the late 1930s to 1970 (Rowse 2005; Kerin 2005). These insights have given rise to more complex interpretations that explore the multiple meanings and possibilities generated by assimilation. Attwood and Haebich contrast the assimilation policies adopted by government leaders such as Paul Hasluck and AO Neville, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia 1915–1940, and anthropologists such as AP Elkin – ‘a driving force behind policies of social assimilation’ and the growing criticism of assimilation in the 1950s and 1960s led by an Aboriginal ‘protest tradition’ together with anthropologists such as Donald Thomson – and later, Elkin himself (Attwood 2003: 102–104, 202–203; Haebich 1988, 2008: 78). This move can be seen to reflect a general shift from racial to cultural paradigms however discourses of Aboriginality continued to polarise traditional/urban categories (Rowse 2000; Langton 1981).
seek recognition based on racial or cultural difference. Acutely aware of the racism confronted by Aboriginal people on a daily basis, Onus and Nicholls intended to achieve equality by appealing to a basic humanitarian concern for equal rights. It seems that the ‘meeting ground’ provided by tourism enabled opportunities for cross cultural exchange that had salience and meaning for Onus’s political agenda – with the potential to become ‘an alternative base of political action’.

Aboriginal Enterprises can also be understood in the context of the radical changes taking place in Aboriginal communities at this time. In response to the rhetoric of assimilation, increasing numbers of Aboriginal people chose to leave behind government reserves and rural towns and migrate into the southern capitals. In so doing they hoped to escape racial discrimination and prejudice and gain access to employment and education. As art historian Lee-Anne Hall points out, ‘colonisation as an imperial project was dependent upon the occupation and control of space’ making the relationship with an Indigenous presence ‘one of contradiction and unease’. In Melbourne Aboriginal people encountered prejudice and discrimination, their movements and activities circumscribed by legislation with limited opportunities for employment and a restricted social life. In response, they drew strength and solidarity from their own initiatives: dances, concerts, theatrical performances, churches and the like. Similar initiatives sprang up elsewhere: the Coolbaroo Club in Perth, Sunshine Club in Darwin and Boatshed in Brisbane all pursued a committed political agenda aimed at fostering social cohesion and a sense of community amidst the fractured legacy caused by dispossession and diaspora.

Paradoxically, coincidental with assimilation polices that sought to destroy Aboriginal identity, a growing interest in Aboriginal art and culture captured

27 Attwood further argues for the revival and transition in humanitarian thinking from the 1830s and the 1920s and 1930s in the struggle for equal rights (Attwood 2003: 198).
29 Rowse argues that the idea of the ‘urban Aboriginal’ is ‘historically and politically volatile’ (Rowse 2000: 171). In Aboriginal history progressive urbanisation in the post war period was initially viewed positively. Rowse undermines these assumptions by drawing attention to the various levels of duress and coercion that prevailed. However it is important not to lose sight of the historical agency of Aboriginal people who chose to ‘walk off’ from reserves and leave town camps on the outskirts of rural towns to avoid the control wielded by managers, the forced removal of children and prevailing racism and unemployment.
30 Prior to 1939 Aborigines were virtually excluded from the city of Melbourne. Following the Second World War, the Aboriginal population of Melbourne grew to 600 in 1949 (Barwick 1963: 32–36).
31 Hall 2004: 54, 56. Maria Nugent’s history of La Perouse in Sydney points up the tenuous nature of its existence; established as a government reserve to disperse Aborigines from Sydney in the 1860s, a Methodist mission 1894–1931 but in 1928 and again in 1964 residents had to resist attempts to remove them from their land (Nugent 2005).
33 See, for example, Corroboree 1949 staged at Wirth’s Olympia (now the Victorian Arts Centre) and An Aboriginal Moomba staged in 1951 at Melbourne’s prestigious Princess Theatre in protest at the exclusion of Aborigines from the Jubilee celebrations (Kleinert 1994, 1999, 2006).
34 Haebich 2008: 283–299. The Coolbaroo Club also opened an outlet for Aboriginal art and craft (Kinnane and Croft 2003: 17).
the interest of Australians at large.\textsuperscript{35} During the 1940s and 1950s a series of exhibitions and publications gained national and international recognition for the bark paintings from Arnhem Land and the UNESCO World Art Series celebrated Australia’s ancient rock art galleries. But, as Nicholas Thomas argues, the interest in Indigenous art in settler societies is far more pervasive than any narrow focus on the fine arts.\textsuperscript{36} During the 1940s and 1950s the popularity achieved by Albert Namatjira’s watercolours made him Australia’s best known Aboriginal and a symbol of successful assimilation. And from 1934 onwards, \textit{Walkabout} magazine portrayed Central Australia (together with iconic images of the Aborigine as noble savage) as the ultimate destination for an expanding tourist industry. At the same time the appropriation of Aboriginal motifs led by Australia’s leading modernist, Margaret Preston, and widely advocated by anthropologists Baldwin Spencer, CP Mountford, Leonhard Adam and Frederick McCarthy, was viewed positively as a means of achieving a distinctive national identity. Later in this paper I examine how Aboriginal people engaged in mediating and negotiating these inscriptions in order to meet new demands for representation and recognition.\textsuperscript{37}

Aboriginal Enterprises arose from a conjuncture of personal, historical and political circumstances. From the late 1930s onwards Onus played a leading role in political struggles for justice and equal rights. At the same time Onus gained renown for his displays of boomerang throwing at public venues such as Koala Park in Sydney, St Kilda Beach in Melbourne and Healesville Sanctuary in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges. In the mid 1940s whilst Onus worked as a shipping clerk on the Melbourne wharves, he also made and marketed Aboriginal art and craft from his home at 33 Terry St, Deepdene, a Melbourne suburb. When injuries sustained in a car accident prevented Onus from returning to his employment, he seized the opportunity to open Aboriginal Enterprises.

From the outset Aboriginal Enterprises was extraordinarily successful - a magnet for local and international tourists. Gundidjmara woman Iris Lovett-Gardner, who worked for Aboriginal Enterprises for seven years recalls, ‘three or four big buses pulling in’ every day.\textsuperscript{38} This was in addition to the many local tourists who travelled by car. Visiting celebrities included the Beatles, Jamaican calypso singer Harry Belafonte, and television stars the Mousketeers from Disney’s Mickey Mouse Club. Aboriginal Enterprises met the desire for an encounter with a ‘primitive’ other, seen as embodying the ‘native essence’ of a new white nation and a romantic past that was passing away.\textsuperscript{39} The location of Aboriginal Enterprises in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges, adjacent to a State Forest, served to engender strong associations. The influence which this natural environment had on local, national and international tourists is revealed in the American newspaper \textit{The Christian Science Monitor} which described how

\textsuperscript{35} Haebich 2008: 302.
\textsuperscript{36} Thomas 1999.
\textsuperscript{37} Phillips and Steiner 1999: 4.
\textsuperscript{38} Lovett-Gardner 1997: 85.
\textsuperscript{39} Nugent 2005: 72.


‘[t]he factory is set in one of the most beautiful pockets of the lovely Dandenongs, against Sherbrook Forest where the remarkable lyre bird still largely lives out his mysterious cycle.’\textsuperscript{40} In this response we see how an Aboriginal presence might be conflated with the flora and fauna to engender romantic associations.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig1.jpg}
\caption{Aboriginal Enterprises, Belgrave, c 1955.}
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Source: Reproduced courtesy Jo and Tiriki Onus.

To be successful, tourist outlets must offer a range of merchandise and Aboriginal Enterprises sold a range of goods: artefacts and furnishings produced in the workshop at the rear of the shop, kangaroo skin rugs, imported bark paintings and didjeridus from Arnhem Land and a range of other small objects. Whereas Aboriginal artists in remote communities were disadvantaged by their distance from markets and the need to rely on dealers to market their work, in the south-east Aboriginal people were able to maintain control over the production and marketing of their wares.\textsuperscript{41} Like Native American communities involved in a tourist economy, Onus ‘did not stay at home waiting for tourists’.\textsuperscript{42} Onus actively participated in a modern market economy, opening branches in Port Augusta (South Australia) in 1964 and Narbethong (Victoria) in about 1965. He also shipped merchandise out to tourist outlets in Australia and overseas.

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\textsuperscript{41} Morphy 1980. By contrast Bsumek examines the production of a generic Navaho style created by producers, middlemen and dealers (Bsumek 2008).
\textsuperscript{42} In her study of American Indians in north-east America, Ruth Phillips identifies a similar entrepreneurial spirit (Phillips 1998: 31).
\end{flushright}
to England, Europe and America.\textsuperscript{43} Such initiatives helped support a wider Aboriginal community: in the 1960s Onus assisted Ella Simon to establish the Gillawarra Gift Shop at Purfleet, New South Wales.\textsuperscript{44} Displaying considerable entrepreneurial skills, Onus toured constantly within Victoria and interstate and on one occasion to New Zealand, staging performances of boomerang throwing at various venues: schools, agricultural shows, department stores and special events such as Scout Jamborees, Home Shows, the 1954 visit of Queen Elizabeth II and the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. These initiatives built on and expanded the network of connections Onus had established in an earlier era, extending Indigenous use of public space for cultural performances of Aboriginality.

\textbf{Art as social action}

The economic success of Aboriginal Enterprises was vitally important to negotiating respect and recognition for a dynamic urban Aboriginal presence in south-eastern Australia. But we should not lose sight of its primary value as a form of social action in fostering cultural maintenance and building social cohesion within a broader Indigenous community. Recent studies highlight the way Aboriginal culture follows its own distinctive trajectories reconnecting with the past and creating new representations engaged in spiritual, moral and political terms both in relation to an Aboriginal landscape and a settler colonial society.\textsuperscript{45} Like other similar initiatives in other capital cities, Aboriginal Enterprises claimed the space of the tourist outlet as their own, rebuilding cultural pride in a way that can be seen as a precursor for future developments such as the Boomalli Aboriginal Cooperative established in Sydney in 1987 as a supportive network for Aboriginal artists.

At Aboriginal Enterprises Onus established a model for cultural maintenance by providing training and employment for a great many Aboriginal people. Onus’s aim was to employ as many Aboriginal people as possible: family members, refugees who had joined the exodus from Aboriginal reserves and rural towns in Victoria and migrated to Melbourne and visitors from interstate.\textsuperscript{46} Interstate Aborigines included Tommy Cusack from Alice Springs and Nyungar artists Alma Toomath and Revel Cooper (1934–1983) who had grown up on the Carrolup mission in south-west Western Australia. In so doing Onus forged new alliances within the small, relatively closed community of Melbourne Aborigines who retained allegiances to their own regional domain. However, Onus found it impossible to obtain sufficient numbers of Aboriginal workers with the necessary skills. He was forced to also employ non-Indigenous artists: at any one time about half the employees were drawn from the wider community including Paula Kerry, Onus’s chief designer plus casual workers, many of whom were

\textsuperscript{44} Kleinert 2009.  
\textsuperscript{45} Morphy 2008; Ginsburg and Myers 2006.  
\textsuperscript{46} Lovett-Gardner 1997.
European migrant women living on nearby farms who preferred to work from home on a piece work basis. Thus Aboriginal Enterprises represented a dynamic multicultural community where Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees worked cooperatively in a form of cottage industry that involved all aspects of production: manufacturing, demonstrating, designing and sales. From a contemporary perspective it is productive to see a parallel between Aboriginal Enterprises and the Indigenous owned design firm Balarinji established by John Moriarty in 1983, which employs both Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists without in any way compromising its Aboriginality.47

Aboriginal Enterprises therefore fulfilled an important role rebuilding traditional patterns of socialisation disrupted through the impact of repressive colonisation. The voice of Indigenous people is testimony to the transformative effect of these experiences on the lives of individuals. Onus’s nephew, political activist Bruce McGuiness (1939–2003), reflected upon ‘the turning point in his life’ at the age of 18 when his uncle Bill Onus ‘persuaded him to stop roaming around the country and join him making boomerangs and other artefacts at Belgrave.’48 Prior to his employment at Aboriginal Enterprises, McGuiness had worked ‘on the wharves, in a circus, in a boxing troupe and as an itinerant labourer.’49 Onus provided Aboriginal people with a powerful role model. As McGuiness recalls, Bill Onus ‘was so proud of being an aboriginal [sic], it was wonderful [he] was a highly intelligent man, and he got me interested in aboriginal [sic] clubs and civil rights movements.’50 McGuiness’s life story makes very clear the impact of Aboriginal Enterprises on individuals.

Onus extended the political reach of Aboriginal Enterprises by touring constantly utilising public space for cultural performances of Aboriginality. Likewise in the mid-1950s, the Coolbaroo Club in Perth extended its reach by holding dances in nearby country towns. Nyungar artist Alma Toomath, for example, met Bill Onus after seeing a display of boomerang throwing at the Esplanade in Perth. In retrospect Toomath recalls:

> Bill Onus used to look after me like his own kid. He was just a wonderful person. He used to make things stick in your head. It was his forcefulness made me go and study so he never died really. He was a good bloke who gave you determination and a good cultural way and in those negative times, he made you think positively … when he saw my paintings he said they were wonderful and it made me think about selling them … The old boy had a great deal of respect for his culture and you can trust a person like that because you understand the law with Aboriginal people.51

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47 Moriarty and McHugh 2000.
By fostering cultural pride, Onus contributed to a process of cultural renewal. Today Aboriginal Enterprises triggers vivid memories for contemporary Aboriginal people who recall wagging school – where they encountered racism and negative Aboriginal stereotypes – to spend the day at Aboriginal Enterprises. This is true for Bill Onus’ son, the artist Lin Onus (1948–1996), Gunai elder Albert Mullett and Bindi Williams whose father Harry Williams worked for Bill Onus. For singer and pianist Margaret Tucker, who performed at weekend concerts in Belgrave, Aboriginal Enterprises was ‘a rallying place for all of us Aborigines’. Thus Aboriginal Enterprises provided a space where Aboriginal people could meet outside the private home when little else was available.

The politics of tourism

To Aborigines in south-eastern Australia, boomerangs are symbolically important as part of their regional heritage: to non-Indigenous Australians returning boomerangs represent a symbol of national identity. In a highly original way the cultural production of Aboriginal Enterprises mediated between these two opposed realms and in so doing, negotiated new roles and meanings for Aboriginal artefacts emblematic of Aborigines’ changed political, historical and economic circumstances. In the wake of nineteenth-century nationalism, the boomerang underwent a series of transformations to become a ubiquitous symbol of national identity. In the process, curator Steve Miller writes, the boomerang ‘became first an Australian rather than a purely Aboriginal signifier, then an international icon of twentieth-century design.’

Boomerang throwing represented a staged ‘spectacle of Aboriginality’ that was a well established tradition in the south-east. From the nineteenth century onwards, Aboriginal people living on missions and reserves such as Coranderrk, Lake Tyers and La Perouse catered for the interest of visitors by providing demonstrations of boomerang throwing and other cultural practices. As Maria Nugent notes, in her study of tourism at La Perouse, ‘local Aboriginal people performed “being Aboriginal” in quite stylised ways that emphasized the exotic, the primitive and the traditional.’ At Aboriginal Enterprises, as at La Perouse, the spectacle of boomerang throwing occurred in various contexts and catered for a range of audiences. When Onus restaged an aspect of traditional Aboriginality and visitors such as Jamaican calypso singer Harry Belafonte, or the then Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kuan Yew, mimicked Aboriginal people by learning to throw the boomerang, ‘conventional relations were momentarily

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54 Philip Jones argues that in the process of appropriation, the boomerang became stereotyped, losing sight of local regional differences and giving rise to many common misconceptions in the process. For example, the returning boomerang was unknown in Tasmania and northern Australia but held special meaning for Aborigines in south-eastern Australia as part of a distinctive regional heritage (Jones 1992).
55 Miller 2008: 32.
56 Nugent 2005: 76.
suspended and inverted’. It would seem that an ‘imperialist nostalgia’ accompanied this conflation of tradition and modernity as Aborigines were inscribed within an essential binary of Stone Age and modernity. From an Indigenous perspective, however, the boomerang, as a sign of Aboriginality, began to assume a new role separate from its former association with the ethnographic context of museum to accrue broader meanings as part of an evolving living culture. Viewed as a form of ‘culture-making’ such performances can be seen as one of the primary means by which Indigenous people negotiate and circulate cultural constructions of identity.

In response to this intensity of interest on the part of the public, Aboriginal Enterprises produced thousands of boomerangs to meet the demand from a domestic and international market. It was reported that Aboriginal Enterprises produced over 20,000 boomerangs annually. With considerable business acumen Bill Onus marketed a range of production that appealed to a diversity of buyers. The best quality boomerangs used blackwood, red wattle or red gum and later, South Australian gidgee. Selecting the wood required considerable expertise and Onus worked with a small team of men to find the roots and elbows necessary for high quality boomerangs. Economic viability prevailed: boomerangs were no longer hand-crafted but manufactured using a band-saw, sander and buff-wheel. Onus also produced a red plastic boomerang made from insulating fibre that was tough, flexible and virtually indestructible in outdoor demonstrations plus small light plywood boomerangs suitable for children.

Such mass production was not in itself a cause for concern but it would lead to questions concerning the authenticity of Aboriginal Enterprises and made the firm susceptible to competition from off shore imports. It also contributed to the marginalisation of women’s craft, unable to compete with such mass production and without the status commanded by the boomerang as a symbol of national identity. In 1955 Onus proudly showed a journalist from *The Australian Home Beautiful* a coiled basket woven by an elderly relative, Sandra Smith, from nearby Healesville using a traditional needle of kangaroo shin bone. Onus reported that, ‘A wholesaler wanted 200 of these, but I could let him have only two, because she takes a week to make a basket.’ Women’s fibre baskets would remain marginalised until the 1980s when Aboriginal women initiated collaborative intercultural processes of cultural revival.

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57 Nugent 2005: 77.
59 Such positive representations of Aborigines as part of a dynamic living culture can be usefully contrasted with the campaign materials and films produced by state and federal governments in support of assimilation (Haebich 2008: 143–154).
60 Myers 1994.
61 Hurst 1955.
62 Hurst 1955.
'He tells the tales of his own people'

It can be seen that Aboriginal Enterprises marked a transition from an earlier, more restricted historical engagement with tourism on Aboriginal reserves towards more urbanised, collective initiatives. Its success hinged on a gender-based collaborative mode of production that was well understood in Aboriginal communities. While Bill Onus worked with a team of men on the production of boomerangs and furniture items, Paula Kerry, together with other artists including her daughter Helen, Alma Toomath and Harry Williams took responsibility for the decoration of artefacts. Commercial artist Paula Kerry (1923–2008) was therefore a key figure in Aboriginal Enterprises. Over a period of 15 years Kerry managed production, provided designs for screen prints, decorated boomerangs and other small items and, in Onus’s absence, acted as sales manager.

Fig 2. Mr Bill Onus, Melbourne, discusses some prints of his new fabric design with his chief designer, Mrs Paula Kerry, *The Australian Home Beautiful*, November 1955.


63 After attending the National Gallery School (possibly part-time) Paula Kerry (later O’Dare) trained as a silk screen designer initially with Vida Turner then with Tubby Grant and Joan Porter whose firm adapted English textile designs for printing in Japan and subsequent resale in Australia. Kerry, together with Geoff Kerry and Ambrose and Phyl Dyson established the Guild Studios in 1949. In the late 1940s Kerry began working freelance for Bill Onus and in 1952 she commenced employment with Aboriginal Enterprises. Kerry’s involvement with Aboriginal Enterprises was political in nature. In retrospect Kerry believed that it was the racism and segregation she witnessed whilst working at Peak Hill, New South Wales in the late 1940s which predisposed her to working with Onus.
In the history of Aboriginal art such collaborative forays between white and black, like that which occurred between Rex Battarbee and Albert Namatjira, and between Geoffrey Bardon and the Papunya painters, are all too rare and tend to be viewed with suspicion as evidence of cultural imperialism. Ian McLean suggests that this negative response has its origins in a Social Darwinist mindset and is continued through the emphasis given to individual self expression that is the basis for European visual traditions by contrast with the communal activity that is central to Indigenous practice. Most importantly, McLean points out, collaboration may take various forms both authorised and illegitimate. If collaboration ‘negotiates something in exchange’, he argues, it can also be ‘a form of resistance’. Given the paucity of debate in this area it is worthwhile exploring in greater detail the mode of production operating at Aboriginal Enterprises.

I begin by considering a much-reproduced photograph taken in 1952 for publicity purposes prior to the opening of Aboriginal Enterprises. The photograph depicts Bill Onus in discussion with ‘Mrs Paula Kerry’ within an Indigenised domestic interior where Aboriginal motifs feature in every aspect of the furnishing – including boomerangs displayed prominently on the picture rail. Onus well understood the importance of such representations as a means of gaining recognition for the ‘Aboriginal cause’. As Indigenous academic Marcia Langton points out, Aboriginality is a ‘field of intersubjectivity … that is remade over and over again in a process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation and interpretation.’ As such the photograph is a representation of Onus’s political goals, at once a denotation of Aboriginal equality and recognition of a distinctive culture. The photograph is also expressive of what Sue Taffe sees as an unusual era of shared purpose and co-operation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in the decades leading up to the successful 1967 Commonwealth referendum when 90.77 per cent of Australians voted to amend the 1901 constitution.

The appropriation of Aboriginal motifs is central to this Indigenised space – indicative of the argument that in the Australian context, a modernist aesthetic is first taken up in design before the fine arts. In the 1950s the appropriation of Aboriginal motifs was viewed positively as a means of achieving a distinctive Australian identity: more recently, with growing awareness of the moral and political issues involved in relation to Indigenous intellectual property, appropriation is condemned as evidence of colonial domination. In response to these generalised assumptions regarding the positive and negative aspects of appropriation Nicholas Thomas suggests that what is required is an exploration for the motivation of particular works and how they were assessed and valued within specific instances of cross cultural discourse. With regard to Aboriginal Enterprises, the question is raised what are the origins of these designs, to what degree was their appropriation authorised and what was the value placed upon these designs?

64 McLean 2009.
65 McLean 2009.
69 Johnson 1996.
70 Thomas 1999: 141.
To intervene in these debates it is necessary to historicise appropriation to understand the broader context of social conditions and particular circumstances at the time of production. In the first instance it is important to acknowledge that Onus authorised Kerry’s use of Aboriginal motifs. Prior to the opening of Aboriginal Enterprises in 1952, Onus paid for Kerry to travel to Alice Springs and Uluru (then Ayers Rock) in Central Australia to expand her knowledge of Aboriginal culture. From a contemporary perspective such out-of-area appropriation would be seen as culturally inappropriate, however Onus’s position can be understood in terms of the devastating impact of colonisation. For Aborigines in south-eastern Australia who had suffered dispossession and unrelenting colonisation, incorporation of Aboriginal motifs from other regions represented a means of cultural revival and a reaffirmation of cultural identity. Distinctions must also be drawn between a contemporary era where policies of self determination offer considerably greater freedom and the restrictions imposed by assimilation policies previously. In retrospect, artist Lin Onus recalled that ‘for artists the only role model of the time was Albert Namatjira. Indeed to introduce any element of Aboriginality into one work would have rendered it both unfashionable and unsaleable.’

The motivation for these appropriations was therefore quite specific. In my conversations with Paula Kerry she clearly differentiated between her work and that of other artists like Melbourne designer France Burke with whose work she was familiar. Kerry, unlike other non-Aboriginal artists, did not use Aboriginal motifs to achieve a distinctive national identity nor as a personal form of artistic expression. Rather these designs were produced ‘for that project … to promote Aboriginal culture’. Informed and aware of Aboriginal political struggles for equality and recognition, Kerry took the opportunity provided by interviews in women’s magazines to raise humanitarian issues. She also placed considerable value on the authenticity of her designs – unlike the generalised designs of Margaret Preston and Frances Burke. For Kerry authenticity meant accurate reproduction of regionally distinctive designs. Indeed Kerry’s research led her to use bright lively colours in place of the restricted palette of stereotypical ochre colours employed by many artists as confirmation of their authenticity. Over time she developed various styles based on her research with particular publications: Brough Smyth’s The Aborigines of Victoria (1878), Charles Mountford’s Art, Myth and Symbolism (1956) and Miller and Rutter’s Child Artists of the Australian Bush (1952) which celebrated the emergence of a distinctive school of children’s art at the Aboriginal settlement of Carrolup. In a photograph of Bill Onus and Nyungar artist Revel Cooper, they hold a boomerang decorated in the ‘Carrolup’ style. Looking at the decoration of the boomerang it is possible to discern Kerry’s process of adaptation

71 During research conducted at La Perouse James Bell also found a strong desire for cultural renewal and for information and images to assist in tourist production (Bell 1967).
72 Onus 1990: 15.
73 Kleinert 1994: 238.
74 Auld 1957: 7.
75 For a recent overview of these debates see Edwards 2005.
76 Children’s art from Carrolup emerged in the late 1940s under the encouragement of the headmaster Noel White and his wife. At the time this movement created considerable interest and its legacy has inspired a contemporary artistic expression among Nyungar in south-west Western Australia. For a recent overview of these developments see Pushman and Walley 2006.
combining motifs from various reproductions: dancing figures, flora and fauna and geometric elements, to create a new design in keeping with the style of the Carrolup School. In the process the boomerang is transformed. Both artefact and art object, the boomerang operates unambiguously as a sign of Aboriginality.

Fig 3. Bill Onus and Nyungar artist Revel Cooper with a boomerang decorated by Paula Kerry in the ‘Carrolup’ style, late 1950s.

Source: Image courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Alick Jackomos collection, Image number N3767.29a.

77 See for example ‘Possum’ by Revel Cooper (Miller and Rutter 1952: 48); Plate 13, ‘A native corroboree’ by Reynold Hart (Miller and Rutter 1952).

78 Burn and Stephen 2002: 255.
It is clear that Onus well understood issues of authenticity. On a number of occasions he publicly condemned the widespread appropriation of Aboriginal motifs: ‘Some goods are being sold bearing figures claimed to be aboriginal [sic] art, but these are simply what the designers consider it should be like’, he said. ‘We produce the real thing.’ Onus’s use of term ‘real’ indicates his awareness of the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal value systems. ‘Under colonial regimes’, Ruth Phillips argues, ‘[such] acts of articulation constitute a form of resistance that needs to be acknowledged … for they lead to the highly effective reassertion of Aboriginal concepts of cultural property and replication made in recent years’. What emerges from this discussion is the disjuncture between culturally different ideas about authenticity. Onus was well aware that essentialist paradigms of authenticity evaluated Aborigines against a primitivist stereotype of the noble savage. From an Aboriginal perspective however it can be shown that the labels ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ are irrelevant. Like Indigenous people elsewhere engaged in the tourist system Onus implemented tactical manoeuvres that played to the primitivist expectations of tourists while maintaining a degree of Indigenous autonomy. For instance the widespread use of tribal names as pseudonyms in some of the cultural production at Aboriginal Enterprises might be seen as reifying a traditional Aboriginality and evidence of authenticity but it can also be seen in a broader context as a reflection of the political transformations taking place in the 1950s and 1960s as an affirmation of cultural identity. Presenting himself as one who could bridge historical and cultural difference, Onus drew upon his cultural knowledge to relay ‘the tales of his own people’. In the process Onus regained a degree of control over these designs thereby undercutting the colonial appropriation of Aboriginal motifs.

Modern Aboriginality

While the cultural production for tourist souvenirs necessarily involves repetition and copying it is important to acknowledge its innovation and creativity. One of the Onus’s most creative initiatives was the adaptation of the classic 1950s kidney shape that graced the swimming pools and furniture of many contemporary homes into a boomerang-shaped table. Presented as a set of nesting plywood tables on three tapering metal-capped legs, the tables signalled the modernity of Aboriginal Enterprises design. Like the Balarinji designs on Qantas jets that wing their way round the world, Onus’s design effectively conflated the binarism of an ancient Stone Age with a quintessential emblem of modernity.

81 For evidence of the tactics employed by Aborigines to retain their dignity and autonomy in their interaction with tourists see Attwood 1989: 141-142; Lydon 2005: 186-205; Kleinert 1994: 130-132.
Fig 4. Aboriginal Enterprises set of nesting tables, 1952.
Source: Reproduced courtesy of Jo and Tiriki Onus.

To decorate the tables Kerry deployed various designs. One of the most popular was the Gunbalanya legend of Buppa Piebi, adapted from an illustration in Colin Simpson’s *Adam in Ochre* (1951). The narrative of Buppa Piebi, a rotund and diminutive figure who walked in the waterholes at night spearing fish, is doubly signified, through playful figurative imagery on the table top and by means of text inscribed around the edge of the table. The popularity of this particular image provides an opportunity to consider how Aboriginal Enterprises negotiated relationships with the market place. Recent studies by Ruth B Phillips and Bennetta Jules-Rosette confirm that the process of signification in tourist exchange involves several stages in the selection and development of tourist souvenirs. They argue that the product and the image ‘are both triggered by and autonomous of the consumer response: neither entirely dictated by the dominant culture nor were they blind and unmotivated.’ Rather Aboriginal Enterprises ‘routinely elected to use images and forms that, while innovative, continued to “make sense” within both Indigenous and [non-Indigenous] signifying systems.’

83 Jules-Rosette 1984: 5.
To illustrate this process it is intriguing to consider the various stages that occurred in the selection and development of imagery at Aboriginal Enterprises. Kerry recalls her first attempts at quality control:

In those early days customers flocked in and bought anything, some of which was stock that was rather awful that had been bought in. Initially I erred on the other side by painting items with what I thought was artistically good, more abstract work and soon found the customers wanted [figures] and easily recognisable Australian fauna i.e. kangaroos and emu etc.85

In this passage we see how Kerry modified her own modernist aesthetic in response to the interest of consumers. A parallel for Kelly’s experience exists in the response of Pastor Albrecht at the Hermannsburg mission as he struggled to establish a nascent souvenir industry in the 1930s. Albrecht recorded the response of visitors to the introduction of poker-worked images on mulga plaques:

the first pieces where we used the old engravings of tjuringas as a design did not sell. But then one of the natives started working freehand drawings of local animals, palms which appealed and sold well.86

Thus we can see how the process of signification in tourist exchange was a good deal more complex than has been allowed in previous scholarship on Aboriginal tourist art. In Aboriginal Enterprises, as in Hermannsburg, public taste tended to prefer figurative and landscape imagery rather than a universalising modernist aesthetic of abstraction. This suggests that the relationship between a modernist aesthetic and design is also more complex than previously assumed. Moreover we see how Aboriginal artists at Hermannsburg, as in other more remote communities, maintained control over the highly valued, restricted knowledge encoded in their cultural forms, by substituting representational imagery which satisfied the market and protected the producer.87

Contemporary perspectives

It is clear that Aboriginal Enterprises achieved considerable success and widespread recognition nationally and internationally. During his lifetime Bill Onus, like Albert Namatjira, became a national figure celebrated as a symbol of successful assimilation – with all the contradictions this implied.88 Yet the cultural production of Aboriginal Enterprises continues to be marginalised, bracketed off as tourist art. The reasons for this exclusion are multi-layered and interconnecting; in part an outcome of the authenticity paradigm governing colonial discourse; in part through dominant narratives of assimilation. Anna Haebich, in her book Spinning the Dream (2008), found that the Coolbaroo League in Perth, another

86 Albrecht cited by Burn and Stephen 1999: 258.
87 Morphy 1980.
88 For the tensions and contradictions created for Albert Namatjira see Burn and Stephen 1992.
Aboriginal initiative with many similarities to Aboriginal Enterprises, has met with a negative response from academics. In their response, the political goals of the organisation are ‘rendered down’, its activities interpreted as ‘vehicles of assimilation’ and the leaders categorised as ‘cultural brokers’ who are seen to have used their leadership to promote assimilation policies and further their own career. Likewise Aboriginal Enterprises was described pejoratively as a ‘boomerang factory’ devoid of any political goals while individuals who worked in tourism, theatre and film were seen to be ‘exploiting their colour’. The narrow frame imposed by these bleak views accords with the dominant historical narratives of the era that defined assimilation negatively in terms of a prevailing ‘culture of poverty’ approach. These responses suggest that for some, Bill Onus’s status as symbol of successful assimilation contributed to the exclusion of Aboriginal Enterprises. But as this paper has shown, leaders like Doug Nicholls and Bill Onus pursued a political agenda aimed at fostering social cohesion and gaining respect and recognition for Aboriginal people. In the process they became powerful role models for Aboriginal people and their achievements created new opportunities for a ‘cultural future’.

Since the 1970s a further radical shift has taken place. Contemporary Aboriginal artists with access to professional training and universities engage in revisionist histories that critique colonial stereotypes. Not surprisingly they look back upon the popular hybridity and fragmented histories of an earlier era with a degree of ambivalence. With earlier paradigms of authenticity called into question, the pervasive appropriation of the 1950s and 1960s is increasingly viewed as kitsch. Kitsch originated in the debates on authenticity and taste mounted in the 1930s and 1940s by the American formalist critic, Clement Greenberg in defence of high art under attack from the inroads of popular culture – in Greenberg’s view ‘an ersatz culture’ that drew upon ‘the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture’. In contemporary art practice, kitsch is remorselessly critiqued by the ironic postmodern sensibility of Indigenous artists such as Gordon Bennett, Destiny Deacon and Christian Thompson. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett points out, such a strategy allows that which is outmoded to be recuperated as a potentially radical gesture. In fact, kitsch highlights modernity’s failure to acknowledge its egalitarian nature.

It would seem that rereading the historical record requires more than a ‘fashionably ironic postmodern distancing’. What is required, Phillips suggests, is more extensive postcolonial analysis of Indigenous cultural practice. This is to acknowledge the many creative interventions of Aboriginal people drawing from within their own resources and selectively implementing processes of adjustment, incorporation and collaboration in response to their colonial

89 Haebich does not cite references for this discussion (Haebich 2008: 298).
91 Langton 1981.
experiences and the changing interests of the wider community. For some contemporary artists such as Lin Onus and Robert Campbell Jnr the basis of their cultural identity is to be found in these early experiences. Failure to acknowledge the Aboriginal ontologies that underpin cultural production in effect lends support for the cultural hierarchies that continue to exclude recognition for the history of Aboriginal art in south-eastern Australia.

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‘It will enlarge the ideas of the natives’:
Indigenous Australians and the tour of Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh

Jessie Mitchell

Between 1867 and 1869, the Australian colonies were visited by Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, the second son of Queen Victoria and the first member of the royal family to tour Australia. This was part of Alfred’s global journey onboard the HMS *Galatea*. Recent years have seen fascinating discussions of this tour by Cindy McCreery, who has considered the Duke’s life as a transnational traveller, his intriguing public persona and the receptions he received by colonists, which brought to light local dynamics of class, gender and nationality.¹ However, historians have rarely paid much attention to the Duke’s encounters with Indigenous Australians. These were the first meetings Indigenous people had with British royalty on their own soil, and while they were not overtly political and yielded few material results, they still deserve consideration for their rich symbolism and for the insights they provide into imperial discourse and colonial life.

A study of these events helps to further our understanding of Indigenous relationships with the British Crown – a mixed history, the importance of which has been highlighted by scholars such as Heather Goodall, Ann Curthoys and Mark McKenna.² By the middle of the 19th century, there had already been a petition to Queen Victoria by the people of Flinders Island (1846) and a loyal address from the Kulin nations of Victoria (1863). The Duke’s receptions can be considered alongside these, but also in contrast to them, as these events of 1867–68 were mostly performative ones, staged by people who had little power to make conventional demands on the government. Nonetheless, they were keen to forge stronger links with the Crown, to increase their local standing, and to present themselves as dignified people and perhaps equal subjects. On these occasions, Alfred himself appears as a rather passive figure: the recipient of addresses and the focal point for local tensions. Nonetheless, his expressions of friendliness, paternalism and British imperialism (while conventional in themselves) could take on complex colonial meanings.

This article focuses on the main Indigenous welcomes, held in South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales. Two Indigenous people, Truganini

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¹ McCreery 2008; McCreery 2007; McCreery 2004.
² For instance, Curthoys 2008: 94, 100-102; Goodall 1996: 76–77; McKenna 2004.
and William Lanne, were present at the Duke’s reception in Hobart in January 1868, but they do not appear to have met him, and their odd status, marginalised and fetishised as the ‘last of their race’, has already been noted by McCreery. Nor have I found any mention of the Duke meeting Indigenous people in Western Australia during his 1869 visit, although plans for a corroboree had been made for his first (cancelled) trip in 1867.

Royal receptions varied greatly between districts. They drew attention, for example, to issues like missionary evangelising in South Australia, the rise of the protection board in Victoria and frontier violence in Queensland, and they serve as a reminder of the diversity of colonial experiences and agendas. At the same time, royal welcomes were affected by wider ideas about empire, monarchy, race and civilisation, and they were publicised and interpreted through colonial and imperial books, journals and newspapers, as part of the obsessive attention paid to Alfred’s travels. As imperial and transnational scholars have observed, the British world of the 19th century saw the movement of ideas, materials, stories and people across boundaries, reshaping and being reshaped by one another. The Duke’s Australian travels were marked by a complex interplay between personal, local and British elements.

These occasions also offer new insights into histories of colonial performance, as Indigenous people, missionaries, colonists and the royal party themselves were put on display. These receptions were exciting occasions which allowed for unusual behaviour and unexpected encounters, while at the same time people were expected to perform versions of their ‘typical’ selves. The result was a mixed process whereby hierarchies of British and colonial life were both reinforced and challenged. Michael Parsons, Jane Lydon, and Anna Haebich and Jodie Taylor have noted that performances, however exploitative or unsatisfactory, were one of the most common and iconic ways Indigenous people and colonists related to each other in public life. A royal visit was an especially potent symbolic occasion. In recent years, international scholars such as Ian Radforth and Jim Miller have examined approaches to the Crown by First Nations people, who negotiated paternalism and exotic performance to proclaim their British loyalty and cultural specificity, and to call for redress of grievances. Australian studies serve as both an addition and a contrast to this. The political and economic status of Indigenous Australians was much lower, and their involvement in the welcomes of 1867–68 consequently weaker, but they did try to make statements of their own. In considering their efforts, our attention is drawn to both the significance and the limitations of public symbolism, for people with few avenues of protest and little access to other forms of power.

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3 McCreery 2007: 37; Mercury, 10 January 1868: 2.
7 Miller 2004; Radforth 2003.
South Australia

The first Indigenous welcome for the Duke was held in November 1867 in South Australia, when the royal party stopped at Woomeran, Loveday Bay. This was near the Point MacLeay mission, set up by the Congregationalist clergyman and ethnologist George Taplin in 1859, amongst the Ngarrindjeri peoples of the Lower Murray lakes. Some 500 Ngarrindjeri travelled within and between their ancestral districts to greet the Duke. This event had an internal importance for these communities, reuniting kin who had been living apart, and providing an occasion for negotiations, vaccinations, fights and church services to be held. At the same time, they were keenly aware of the significance of a royal visit. Many dressed up, while the men practised marching ‘so as to appear in an orderly manner before the Duke’. However, problems soon arose. The local protector, EB Scott, had encouraged them to attend so that he could show them off, but he also caused offence by trying to control their movements. His incorrect instructions caused some people to arrive late, and he urged them to remain in the scrub away from the royal landing place, even forbidding them to fetch water. In the end, Taplin, irritated by Scott’s behaviour, led them to the lake anyway, and the people declared ‘Minister is our master, we must do what he tells us’.8 For the Duke’s arrival, the Ngarrindjeri crowd held up a Union Jack, a banner stating ‘Point Macleay’ and ‘Welcome to our country’, and a red, white and blue flag reading ‘Goolwa blackfellow big one glad see im Queen picaninny’.9 I have not discovered who wrote the slogan – it suggests a settler’s wish to portray Indigenous people as foreign and comical – but the symbols combined to send a complex message of imperial loyalty, Indigenous specificity and attachment to the countryside. Assuming settlers had some involvement, it is also indicative of their wish to utilise Indigenous imagery when portraying their own identity.

Thus, even before the Duke arrived, his visit brought to the surface powerful local elements: the enduring connections between Ngarrindjeri families, the mingled paternalism and protection supplied by mission life, the tensions between missionaries and settler authorities, and the struggles for control over the landscape and the movements of people within it. The contrast between the two forms of travel which brought the Duke and the Ngarrindjeri to this place also draws attention to an irony noted by Ann Curthoys: that Aboriginal Australians have commonly been labelled ‘nomadic’ when trying to remain on their lands, by colonists whose own lives were shaped by arrival, exploration and distance from home.10

Upon the Duke’s arrival, a welcoming address, signed by 24 people, was read out by an adolescent boy called George Pantuni, who was flanked by young people in European dress and older people in traditional cloaks.11 His speech was a break with Indigenous tradition, where senior diplomacy was the province of the

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8 Taplin, Diaries: 1–11 November 1867, PRG 186-1/12, vol 6, 4/5 fiche, Edith Gertrude Beaumont Papers, State Library of South Australia [hereafter SLSA]; Taplin 1879[1873]: 111–112.
9 Milner and Brierly 1869: 177.
11 Jenkin 1979: 151.
elders, although their presence and Pantuni’s facility with English might suggest a certain willingness to let him speak. Pantuni welcomed the Duke and wished him a safe journey. He explained that the men were going to dance for him as they used to before the white people came, but that he must not misunderstand and think that they were ‘wild blacks’. In fact, these people had had a Christian education and gathered every Sunday ‘to pray to the same God and hear of the same Jesus as your Royal Highness does.’ He went on:

Some have given up native customs and become real Christians, and many others are learning the way. Many of us got an honest living by working like white people. We have often been told about the Queen your mother, and we hope and pray that God will always bless her, and may His blessing rest upon her children, especially yourself, and may He take care of you till you see your mother’s face in England again.¹²

Pantuni’s speech asserted his people’s dignity, civilisation and British subjecthood, along with a complex disavowal and maintenance of Ngarrindjeri traditions.¹³ His speech was shaped by mission life, which provided the only setting where large numbers of Indigenous people could communicate with the royal party in any sustained way, however conventional or diluted. This scene was also reminiscent of a wider tradition of native peoples in other parts of Australia – and throughout the empire – appealing to the Crown for protection and support. The language of paternalism was significant here, and it carried several layers of meaning. Henry Reynolds, for instance, describing appeals to the Crown by Indigenous Tasmanians, notes how the discourse of paternalism could be absorbed, to some degree, into their own language of kinship.¹⁴ In the case of the Ngarrindjeri, though, I would add that the references to Queen Victoria and her children fitted in with the queen’s public image as wife, mother and symbol of domestic love.¹⁵ Here, Indigenous people can also be seen as drawing on more mainstream British traditions.

Taplin reported that Pantuni spoke well. The missionary was hopeful that the Duke’s visit would further his own campaigns for Christian civilisation: ‘It will enlarge the ideas of the natives, and give them notions of rank and honour and dignity, which it was difficult to make them understand before.’¹⁶ However, if this was a statement of British hierarchy, it was also an acknowledgement that local authority was contested. Taplin had an uneasy history with his neighbours, who had accused him of ambition and greed, prompting an investigation by the Legislative Council in 1860.¹⁷ While the committee had exonerated Taplin of wrongdoing, he was presumably concerned for his image during the royal visit. When Scott neglected to introduce the speakers properly, an angry Taplin felt

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¹² Argus, 19 November 1867: 5; Anon 1867: 54; Register, 14 November 1867: 3.
¹³ Taplin, Diaries: 11 November 1867, PRG 186-1/12, vol 6, 4/5 fiche, SLSA.
¹⁵ Tyrell 2000: 120.
¹⁶ Taplin 1879[1873]: 112–113.
obliged to send Pantuni forward alone, ‘lest it be said I merely got up the address to obtain personal notice to myself.’ If the visit drew attention to missionary work, it also highlighted Taplin’s limitations.

Samuel Calvert “The Kuree Dance, as witnessed by the Duke of Edinburgh in South Australia. Illustrated Australian News 26 November 1867.

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Perhaps the most prominent part of the Duke’s reception were the songs and dances held to welcome him. At the lakeside, mingled elements of protocol, kinship, material wealth and colonial power became clear. Most Ngarrindjeri people refused to dance until their relatives had all arrived, and an odd situation of enticement and coercion followed, as impatient colonists roamed the camp offering money to people, while Scott tried to bully them into performing. Taplin wrote crossly ‘They say he threatened them & was very angry to make them dance & sing.’ Later, however, a larger group gathered, and the men painted themselves in intricate patterns before the corroboree. Witnesses noted that they took great care with their display, but would not explain its meaning to the colonists and royal party watching.

In this respect, they were continuing a long colonial tradition. Parsons, and Haebich and Taylor have noted that corroborees were often staged for colonial audiences during the 19th century. They could be a way for impoverished people to turn their cultural knowledge into material profit, but they were also used to conciliate colonists and governors, and could be held on queen’s birthdays or

18 Taplin, Diaries: 11 November 1867, PRG 186-1/12, vol 6, 4/5 fiche, SLSA.
19 Taplin, Diaries: 12–13 November 1867, PRG 186-1/12, vol 6, 4/5 fiche, SLSA; Woods 1868: 85–87.
to welcome important guests. Parsons adds that public corroborees may have also enabled the maintenance of some restricted ritual knowledge, as their significance was rarely explained to white observers.\textsuperscript{20} Jane Lydon takes this further, observing that visual and embodied performances were crucial to how Indigenous societies experienced human relations and ties to land. At their best, performances were public assertions of rights to knowledge and country, and of reciprocal connections between visitors and hosts.\textsuperscript{21}

Responses from the Duke’s party were mixed. One account stated that the viewers saw the dance as strange and absurd, but also admired its precision and skill.\textsuperscript{22} Parsons has noted that many white audiences did not want to understand corroborees, but preferred to assume that they were generically mysterious, their supposed universal strangeness helping (paradoxically) to create a sense of the Australian landscape as unified and familiar.\textsuperscript{23} This helps to explain the enthusiasm with which colonists across different districts called for ‘the Aborigines’ to be gathered and made to dance for the royal party. This was part of a wider exhibition of colonial unity and stability.

The Duke’s own response was layered. He thanked the ‘Men of the Lake Tribe’ for their welcome and expressed pleasure at meeting them. He added that he hoped their children would become good Christians and emulate colonial civilisation. Perhaps necessarily, he combined interest in their performance with support for missionary evangelising, remarking:

\begin{quote}
The unusual sight of some of your national customs, which owing to civilization and Christianity [sic] are rapidly falling to disuse, tends to assure me of the progress you are making to a good end, and of the success which is evidently attending the kind endeavours of teachers and instructors.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

Ngarrindjeri dances and songs were welcome here – and indeed aggressively demanded – yet in the Duke’s address they were associated with a way of life assumed to be vanishing for the best. Connecting with the familial language of Pantuni’s speech, the Duke promised to tell the queen of ‘the touching manner in which you ask the blessing of the God you have learned to worship, in common with us, to fall on her and on her family.’\textsuperscript{25} Following the dance, he sent for his own musician to play the bagpipes, ‘much to the astonishment and gratitude of the natives, who had probably never heard such music before.’\textsuperscript{26} The piper’s performance may have been intended as another sign of empire, but its strangeness in this landscape was made apparent by the Ngarrindjeri response,
and the reciprocal nature of the musical moment – mutual performances being important to Indigenous welcomes\textsuperscript{27} – may have allowed the participants, albeit briefly, to step outside of any simple model of domination.

However, if this was an unusual public moment, it also brought to light conflicts which were all too familiar. After the men had performed, some women agreed to sing and dance too, but were disrupted when a white man in the crowd asked them to take off their clothes. The women were offended, and demanded ‘What for blackwoman do that, when whitewomen no do it?’\textsuperscript{28} This request was presumably seen as a slur upon the women’s dignity and Christianity – it raised questions, too, about the respectability of the royal party watching. It also had local resonance. According to the South Australian \textit{Register}, the man in question was the Hon John Baker, a successful pastoralist and conservative politician whose run was used to host the Duke’s visit, and who had a hostile history with the missionary Taplin, as they vied for control over the surrounding land.\textsuperscript{29} Sexual, racial and geographical tensions could be nastily personal, but they also connected with wider colonial and imperial worlds as they were reported in the press. The back-and-forth nature of controversy and story-telling became alarmingly clear when the argument with the Ngarrindjeri women was described in the \textit{Register}, and John Baker’s son stormed into the editor’s office and assaulted him – an event which was then reported in other colonial papers.\textsuperscript{30}

If performance was one way of establishing a relationship with the Crown, the use of the countryside was another. Here, conflicts resurfaced, as Ngarrindjeri men wanted to show the Duke how they hunted kangaroo, but found that Baker shut them out of the festivities. They complained furiously to Taplin ‘John Baker been steal our prince.’\textsuperscript{31} As it turned out, the Duke’s hunting trip was an unsatisfactory experience for him too; the royal party had hoped to travel privately and were vexed when large crowds of settlers gathered to watch.\textsuperscript{32} McCreery has noted Alfred’s dislike of pomp and his preference for informal male gatherings; this was an escape from public life but also part of Alfred’s public image.\textsuperscript{33} A different dynamic developed, though, during his hunting expedition at Yorke’s Peninsula, ‘with blackfellows and dogs’. They were guided, one source said, by ‘an eccentric old native’; presumably, Indigenous men were exercising a certain quiet control over the party’s movements. Here, native guides were welcomed for their expertise, but they occupied a curious position: neither servants, equal participants, nor members of the public. Still, a brief closeness was shared, as the party shot kangaroos and possums together and slept overnight in a woolshed. These Indigenous men were also amused by the astonished delight of the English guests when they first glimpsed kangaroos. This

\textsuperscript{27} Lydon 2005: 27.
\textsuperscript{28} Argus, 19 November 1867: 5; Register, 14 November 1867: 3.
\textsuperscript{29} Anon 1969: 75–76; Account reproduced in the \textit{Mercury} (Hobart), 25 November 1867: 4; \textit{Perth Gazette and West Australian Times}, 20 December 1867: 3; Jenkin 1979: 85–95.
\textsuperscript{30} See \textit{Mercury} (Hobart), 25 November 1867: 4.
\textsuperscript{31} Taplin, \textit{Diaries}: 13 November 1867, PRG 186-1/12, vol 6, 4/5 fiche, SLSA.
\textsuperscript{32} Woods 1868: 85, 88.
moment drew attention to the royal party’s particular status: as imperial visitors assuming their right to the landscape, but also as foreigners new enough to be fascinated by this alien land and aware of their own displacement within it.34

A different combination of power and bewilderment took place during the Duke’s last recorded Indigenous encounter in South Australia. When travelling past Wellington and Mount Barker along the Murray River, the royal party came across a platform: a burial site holding the preserved bodies of five people. They paused in the rain to behold it, and in a memoir by Oswald W Brierly, captain of the *Galatea*, this was portrayed as symbolic. The scene, he said, ‘had a dreary, sad look, which was quite in keeping with the idea that the race was fast passing away’.35 On this occasion, Indigenous people were not there to control the use of their lands and prevent the strangers’ access to sensitive sites. Furthermore, even the relatively friendly and active encounters they had had with the royal travellers could not stop the myth of their supposedly natural extinction being promulgated in yet another public account.

**Victoria**

Victorian residents had also hoped to stage elaborate corroborees for Alfred’s arrival.36 Andrew Porteous, for example, a pastoralist at Mt Emu Creek, received a request from the organisers of the royal reception to send as many Aborigines as possible to Buninyong to dance for the Duke.37 Such plans show the power that squatters in the western districts were assumed to wield over Indigenous people. However, the Victorian events also demonstrated another notable development in this region: the exceptional powers being assumed by the Central Board Appointed to Watch over the Interests of the Aborigines. In the above case, Porteous told the Board that he was concerned about the proposed corroborees, reminding them that some men invited to dance in Ballarat the previous year had become so ill and drunk that two of them died. In response, the Board issued a circular banning Indigenous people from townships during the royal visit.38 The increased travel of colonists and British visitors around Victoria as part of the Duke’s tour was to be accompanied by an inverse process of tighter restrictions on Indigenous movement.

The Board’s concerns about drunkenness and exploitation may have been legitimate, but it is tempting to wonder if they were also hoping to avoid political awkwardness. For, if Indigenous Victorians had suffered disproportionately from government control and loss of land, they had also begun to develop unusually visible activism. 1867 had already seen successful protests by

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35 Milner and Brierly 1869: 188–189.  
36 Argus, 23 October 1867: 5, also 16 October 1867: 5, 19 October 1867: 5, 29 November 1867: 6, 3 December 1867: 7.  
people around Warrnambool to prevent the Board from closing their station at Framlingham. Moreover, the Kulin peoples, who were forming a strong community on Coranderrk station near Healesville, had already sent gifts and declarations of allegiance to Queen Victoria and her family, and the popular mythology surrounding Coranderrk portrayed it as a gift from the queen on their traditional lands. Indeed, at the 1863 governor’s levee where the Woiwurrung and Daungwurrung spokesmen presented their addresses to the Crown, they included a present for Prince Alfred and were pleased to hear that he might visit them. The relative security and progress of Coranderrk had been noticed by other communities keen to acquire their own reserves. However, the chance to raise these issues (or any others) at a royal reception was denied.

The Duke did meet some Indigenous men in Victoria, though, and these meetings could involve performative elements and links to wider networks. One man – described only as Jim who worked for Mr Brodie of Bulla Bulla – presented an address for the Duke in Sunbury, the country of the Marin Balug clan of the Woiwurrung people. The address, which seemed to have been penned by a European, assured the Duke of the loyalty of the Aboriginal race to the British Crown and hoped that he would enjoy his visit and return safely to ‘our great mother, to whom, through you, we proffer our allegiance and homage’.

The sentiments were conventional, but given the history of Woiwurrung activism, the man’s wish for a connection with the Crown may well have been serious.

Nonetheless, such encounters were brief and their records fragmented. They did not allow for the deeper dynamics of community and country implicit in the South Australian gathering; rather, the press tended to load onto a handful of Indigenous men the task of symbolically representing their whole race – and, at times, standing in for a handful of Indigenous men the task of symbolically representing their whole race – and, at times, standing in for a handful of Indigenous men the task of symbolically representing their whole race. This became apparent when one man tried unsuccessfully to present himself to the Duke in Geelong. This was Dan-dan-nook or King Jerry, apparently one of the last survivors of the Barrabool clan of the Wathawurrung. His appearance at the public celebrations was dignified, and it connected him with Geelong society and a wider literary world. He was wearing a new suit, with a rifleman’s badge and a medal from the athletics club showing that he had once been the fastest runner in the township. The press described him ‘taking his seat on the steps of the dais before the Prince arrived, and looking calmly upon the brilliant scene, as if he was the monarch of all he surveyed.’ (The bestowing of king-names upon Indigenous men was a mocking gesture by colonists, and here the press referred frequently to the contrast between these two ‘royal’ figures.) He planned to present the Duke with a book on Aboriginal languages by Daniel Bunce, an English botanist,

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43 Argus, 14 February 1868: 5. For more about Woiwurrung language and clans, see Clark 1990: 383-384.
44 Geelong Advertiser, 3 December 1867: 2; Geelong Register, 2 December 1867: 2.
traveller and journalist who had settled in western Victoria. This work described Indigenous languages and cultural practices, and portrayed them as an intelligent, ill-used race. For its time, it was a sympathetic publication, but I have not discovered whose idea it was for Dan-dan-nook to present it, or how much he knew about its contents. This edition contained a picture of him and an inscription dedicating the book to the Duke as a specimen of Aboriginal languages and describing Dan-dan-nook as the remaining representative of his tribe. His status as the ‘last’ Barrabool man allowed him entry into this imperial milieu but it also isolated him, and ultimately he missed the Duke’s arrival. The mayor of Geelong presented the book instead, out of kindness or perhaps the wish to make a memorable local present. Thus, Dan-dan-nook, who may have hoped to be greeted as an equal subject and/or an original owner of the land, was reduced instead to a portrait, both immortalised and dismissed.

Another man in the western district was more successful, when the Duke spent a day at Hopkins Hill, Mr Moffat’s station. Here, tensions developed again between the Duke’s wish for privacy and the demands for contact by Moffat’s white neighbours. However, Alfred made an exception for a Dhauwurdwurrung man called Jim Cain. Cain had taken his English name from a whaler, worked for Richard Rutledge (one of the early pastoralists of Port Phillip) and visited Sydney several times. Thus, Cain was a traveller himself, with some wider colonial links, yet also determined, apparently, to remain around his homeland. The press noted that Cain was delighted by the Duke’s wish for an introduction. However, if this meeting was exceptional, it also brought to light long-standing racial tensions. Ian D Clark has traced Dhauwurdwurrung resistance to pastoralism during the 1840s, which was broken by the Native Police, and by the middle of the century the remaining Dhauwurdwurrung survived through hunting, charity and station work. When the *Warrnambool Examiner* described the handshake between Cain and the Duke, a history of dependence, resentment and coexistence lay behind this. The writer complained that Cain would not stop boasting about the royal compliment:

> The circumstance has made him as proud as Lucifer, and from the time of the hand-shaking, Jim has evinced a great disinclination to lower his dignity by performing any kind of work. Having heard that it was not the custom of His Royal Highness to shake hands with anyone, and that only one of Mr Moffat’s guests (Mr Richmond Henty) had been so honoured, Jim’s conceit knew no bounds. ‘Mine big one fellow now’, said Jim; ‘Duke shake hands along o’ me; lick all you __ white fellows; Duke

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46 Bunce 1856: v–x, 1–59.
47 Argus, 2 December 1867: 5, 3 December 1867: 5; Knight 1868: 117–118.
48 Geelong Advertiser, 3 December 1867: 3; Knight 1868: 117–118. For more on Dan-dan-ook, see Clark 1990: 304–305, 330.
49 Hamilton Spectator, 27 November 1867: 2, 4 December 1867: 2, 11 December 1867: 2.
no shake hands with Bill Rutledge even, only ‘long o’ me; mine fust-rate chap now’, etc etc. I believe that the darky intends to call himself Duke Alfred for the future.\textsuperscript{52}

Cain was mocked here, but given the Duke’s avoidance of local colonists, Cain’s own ridicule of the settlers around him also carried a sting. The royal encounter was a fleeting one, and Cain probably appeared as a curiosity to the Duke’s party. However, the novelty went both ways, and if Cain showed conventional loyalty to the Crown, he was also able to disrupt (albeit momentarily) the local hierarchies of settler society.

\textbf{Queensland}

If immediate frontier violence had mostly finished in Victoria by 1868, this was not the case in the north. Widespread and bloody dispossession accompanied the spread of colonialism in Queensland, and this fact was both obscured and signified in the welcome for the royal party in Brisbane. Here, alongside the other military units, the Duke was greeted and escorted by the Native Mounted Police (NMP).\textsuperscript{53} Behind their neat parade lay a frightening history of two decades of paramilitary support for the pastoralist sector.\textsuperscript{54} Early in 1868, at the same time as the Duke’s reception was being planned, heated debates were taking place about this armed body. Several politicians called for the NMP to be abolished or reformed, alleging that atrocities and massacres were being committed, as part of a policy of ‘extermination’. Other speakers disagreed, claiming that protecting settlers should be the first priority, or worrying that getting rid of the police force would only lead to greater unofficial violence towards Aborigines. Some commentators sneeringly described Indigenous people as animals who must be destroyed, and there were angry debates about whether they were really British subjects at all. Police officers were urged (apparently fruitlessly) to operate in a more cautious, accountable way, but ultimately the opponents of the NMP did not have the parliamentary numbers to force real change.\textsuperscript{55} The practice of sending native troops to discipline or terrorise people in neighbouring regions was used in various British realms, and as Julie Evans has argued, discrimination and cruelty towards colonised people can be seen as producing the very rule of law that was being broken.\textsuperscript{56} The presence of the NMP at the Duke’s welcome could be taken as a statement of their ongoing use and connection to the empire.

However, the NMP were not the only Indigenous men present. Before the royal ship docked, another group lined up along the gangway, to the surprise of most of the crowd: ‘a band of natives, in war costume, with their bodies painted with various coloured clays, and their hair ornamented with feathers’. There were

\textsuperscript{52} Warrnambool Examiner, 13 December 1867: 3.
\textsuperscript{53} Queensland Daily Guardian, 25 February 1868: 2; Queenslander, 29 February 1868: 2.
\textsuperscript{54} Evans 2007: 71–75; Reynolds 2001: 105–118.
\textsuperscript{56} Evans 2005: 59, 68. See also Richards 2008: 119–121, 185–200.
perhaps 50 or 60 men – ‘an uncommonly fine looking lot ... in very high spirits’ – carrying weapons, their hair whitened and their faces and chests painted yellow, white and brown to represent different clans. They lined up, the press noted, as neatly as soldiers, then marched in the royal parade, singing their ‘war song’, and stood to attention at the gates of Government House as the carriages passed through.\footnote{Petrie 1904: 210–212; Queensland Daily Guardian, 25 February 1868: 2; Queenslander, 29 February 1868: 2.}

These marchers had been invited by the organisers at the last minute, a decision which may have been hasty and taken without much thought. However, it occurred within an interesting context. The marchers gathered under the guidance of Thomas Petrie, a local colonist considered a ‘friend to the Aborigines’, who had known Indigenous people around Brisbane since his childhood, spoke a little of the Turrbal language, and had travelled with them in the Bunya range and employed them on his Pine Creek station. According to his daughter, Petrie knew that Indigenous people were being targeted, sometimes for atrocious violence, but felt powerless to intervene because the authorities implicitly supported it.\footnote{Hall 1974: 440–441; Petrie 1981[1904]: 1–9.}

Petrie’s account only hinted, unfortunately, at how the Indigenous men experienced the Duke’s welcome. Like many settlers in the crowd, they were disappointed by the Duke’s plain dress; they had been expecting something like the grand attire worn by colonial officials. If the Indigenous men were performing their identity, they expected royalty to do the same.\footnote{Petrie 1981[1904]: 210–212.} Nonetheless, they were happy, Petrie said, to receive half-a-crown each, plus oranges and biscuits; they gave three cheers for the queen and told him that they would be glad to appear like this again.\footnote{Petrie 1981[1904]: 210–212.} This need not be seen as a straightforward performance for pay, however. These men may well have felt it appropriate to be the first people to welcome the Duke. Furthermore, any statement they intended about their own strength and dignity may not have been aimed at the Duke alone; great crowds of colonists were also watching. The Queensland newspaper coverage veered between arrogance, fascination and alarm. Few settlers knew about the plan to include the Aborigines, and their sudden arrival ‘suggested to timid minds dreadful thoughts’.\footnote{Queensland Daily Guardian, 25 February 1868: 2; Queenslander, 29 February 1868: 2.}

I have found no mention of any exchange between these marchers and the NMP. The presence of both groups of men conveyed mixed messages: implicitly denying the clashes taking place between this force and tribal people, but also serving as a visual reminder of the contrast between policing and ‘savagery’ – or
of the vulnerability of so-called savages against the police. This is reminiscent of recent discussions by scholars about the complex nature of the Australian ‘frontier’. The frontier was traditionally imagined as a clear dividing line between colonised and uncolonised, ‘civilised’ and ‘savage’, which would naturally vanish as white settlement proceeded. However, scholars such as Lynette Russell, Richard Davis and Deborah Bird Rose have questioned this, demonstrating instead that frontiers could be lasting, layered and permeable; personal and cultural entities as well as geographical and temporal ones. At this celebration of monarchy, empire and settler progress, the theme of conquest was overt and uneasy – largely inarticulate, and yet startlingly present.

New South Wales

Indigenous performances also marked the Duke’s visits to Sydney in February and March 1868. However, these pointed to different facets of colonialism. One notable event was a cricket match by a team of Jardwadjali, Gunditjmara and Wotjobaluk men from western Victoria. These athletes – managed and exploited by white sportsmen – had stolen out of Victoria against the protection board’s orders and toured New South Wales. They appeared for the Duke just before leaving for their famous tour of England. Up to 9000 people watched them play at the Albert Cricket Ground against officers from the Duke’s party, whom they outclassed. They then demonstrated athletics, spears, boomerangs and throwing sticks, and held a sham fight, dressed in black undergarments, possum skins and lyre-bird feathers. While their shows incorporated traditional skills and decorations, they were not welcoming their viewers or affirming links to their own country, as the performers in South Australia and perhaps Brisbane had done. Nor were they simply sportsmen. Rather, as David Sampson argues, they were part of a long tradition of ‘professional savages’ who travelled the world (willingly or unwillingly) performing versions of their ‘native’ selves for British audiences. At these matches, the men were shown as simultaneously savage and tame, and nakedness and violence were both signified and concealed. Such shows were easy to stage in New South Wales, where settler power was relatively secure but where there was no protection board to curtail Indigenous travel, commercialisation and display. Ann Curthoys has noted that this was an era of minimal state intervention in Indigenous affairs in New South Wales; the official stance was one of indifference and neglect.

For the royal visit, a ‘grand corroboree’ was also planned at Clontarf, on the north side of Sydney Harbour, and this might have become a more profound occasion. According to the press, Indigenous people around Sydney had been keen to meet the Duke, and when it was announced that he would distribute gifts and blankets at a public celebration, about 300 people gathered.

63 Milner and Brierly 1869: 373–374; Sydney Morning Herald, 5 February 1868: 3, 6 February 1868: 2.
This was reminiscent of the old governor’s feasts held in Parramatta in the early days, and for Indigenous people there may have been a lingering sense of the Crown recognising them (however inadequately) as the original owners of the land.\(^{67}\) The *Sydney Empire* said this was the largest Aboriginal gathering in the city that the current generation of colonists could recall.\(^{68}\) By the following decade, as Heather Goodall and Maria Nugent have noted, Sydney’s Indigenous population would become larger, less welcome and more heavily controlled by the state, as the agricultural sector pushed more people out of their traditional districts.\(^{69}\) Their gathering for the Duke fell at the end of one era and the start of another.

They would be disappointed, however, and in a shocking way. The Duke was making his way to Cabbage Tree Beach, where the people were getting ready to dance, when a mentally disturbed Irishman called Henry James O’Farrell stepped out of the crowd and shot him. Alfred survived, but there was immediate chaos and an explosion of mob violence towards O’Farrell, the police and bystanders. The Indigenous crowd may have joined in this. With approval (and perhaps embroidering), the *Sydney Empire* noted:

> The excitement and anger of the aborigines were as great, and more strongly expressed, than those of their white visitors; for upon learning that the assassin had not been summarily lynched on the spot, they asked for his body for the purpose of ‘roasting him’.\(^{70}\)

If Indigenous people had been invited to perform as exotic figures, they were incorporated here into another image of ‘savagery’, which was complex and ironic. It included the Aborigines (momentarily) in the body politic of enraged British subjects, while also displacing onto them the undoubtedly savage behaviour of the predominantly white crowd. A more subdued and humane response was voiced by an Indigenous man called John Weiman, who had travelled to Sydney with a group from Moruya to dance for the royal party. Weiman apparently wrote to friends that they had been looked after at the Duke’s expense and were glad to hear that he was recuperating well. A certain royal connection and subjecthood were voiced here, but the chance for a greater public statement had been missed.\(^{71}\)

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\(^{68}\) Reproduced in the *Argus*, 1 April 1868: 5.


\(^{71}\) *Argus*, 7 April 1868: 7. See also *Argus*, 5–6 February 1868: 5, 30 March 1868: 1 supplement; *Brisbane Courier*, 25 January 1868: 4, 4 March 1868: 2; *Sydney Mail*, 14 March 1868: 4.
Conclusion

The meetings between the Duke of Edinburgh and Indigenous Australians highlight both the importance and the limitations of Indigenous links to the British Crown, in a setting where dispossession was severe and Indigenous people’s material and political influence small. The people who welcomed the Duke obtained few tangible benefits, although it may have added to their political insight and public standing. These events can be added to a growing body of international scholarship which contemplates the curious bonds between the Crown and the native peoples of the lands seized in its name. At the same time, however, Alfred’s receptions draw our attention to the peculiarly narrow options available to Indigenous Australians.

More broadly, these royal meetings can be seen as deeply paradoxical. They helped Indigenous people to reach out to the British Crown, but they occurred in an era when settlers’ power was being consolidated – a factor which had prompted the royal tour in the first place. They allowed Indigenous people to challenge the usual order, but they could do so only through expressing loyalty to the imperial centre. This British loyalty, in turn, often required people to perform versions of native tradition, exoticism and difference, as well as compliance and ‘civilisation’. This led to public displays which could both challenge and reinforce settler power and make visible the hierarchies and tensions of colonial life.

Studies such as this also draw our attention to the regional factors that shaped Australian histories. Historical accounts of Indigenous Australia and settler-colonialism have often focused on specific states or districts, while also taking Australian-ness and national boundaries rather for granted. New perspectives emerge from events like the Duke’s tour, which functioned to both unite the colonies and highlight their differences, while also contributing to a more coherent discourse of settler-colonialism and racial thought. In turn, the imperial and transnational nature of the royal visit reminds us of how local dynamics of conquest, accommodation and resistance took place in a much wider setting, and affected it in turn. If there is something seductive about the freewheeling nature of many transnational histories and lives, the royal greetings staged by Indigenous people remind us of other understandings of space, and other costs incurred. These scenes were fleeting yet memorable. As one journalist remarked upon the Indigenous welcome for the Duke in Brisbane: ‘For a moment the attention of the people was entirely diverted from the Prince to the strange guard which had been formed to do him honour’.

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72 Miller 2004; Radforth 2003.
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The etymology of Coober Pedy, South Australia

Petter Naessan

The aim of this paper is to outline and assess the diverging etymologies of ‘Coober Pedy’ in northern South Australia, in the search for original and post-contact local Indigenous significance associated with the name and the region. At the interface of contemporary Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara opinion (mainly in the Coober Pedy region, where I have conducted fieldwork since 1999) and other sources, an interesting picture emerges: in the current use by Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara people as well as non-Indigenous people in Coober Pedy, the name ‘Coober Pedy’ – as ‘white man’s hole (in the ground)’ – does not seem to reflect or point toward a pre-contact Indigenous presence.

Coober Pedy is an opal mining and tourist town with a total population of about 3500, situated near the Stuart Highway, about 850 kilometres north of Adelaide, South Australia. Coober Pedy is close to the Stuart Range, lies within the Arckaringa Basin and is near the border of the Great Victoria Desert. Low spinifex grasslands amounts for most of the sparse vegetation. The Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta region is characterised by dwarf shrubland and tussock grassland. Further north and northwest, low open shrub savanna and open shrub woodland dominates.1 Coober Pedy and surrounding regions are arid and exhibit very unpredictable rainfall.

Much of the economic activity in the region (as well as the initial settlement of Euro-Australian invaders) is directly related to the geology, namely quite large deposits of opal. The area was only settled by non-Indigenous people after 1915 when opal was uncovered but traditionally the Indigenous population was western Arabana (Midlaliri). Indigenous people – of whom the largest group consists of Pitjantjatjara speakers with ties much further north-west – now live both in Coober Pedy itself and on ‘the Reserve’, Umoona, which is the Indigenous community area outside Coober Pedy. According to Aŋangu (‘Western Desert people’) and non-Indigenous people I have spoken with, the number of Indigenous people in the Coober Pedy region (that is, including Umoona) would be 300–500 people but estimates are hard to ascertain – it should be remembered that a sizeable number of the Indigenous population in the region is highly mobile.

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1 Cochrane 1963: 642.
The town has two service stations and two supermarkets – one in the upper part of Hutchinson Street called the ‘Miner’s Store’, and ‘Lucas’ in the lower part of the main street. There are two liquor shops, one next to the Lucas entrance, the other in the upper part of Hutchinson Street adjacent to the Opal Inn Motel. There is one bank (Westpac), a post office, several small restaurants and other small shops, a hospital, the Coober Pedy Area School, and the Technical and Further Education vocational college (TAFE). A small aerodrome lies outside the town, and there is a small bus station at which buses arrive from Adelaide and Alice Springs on a daily basis. Several motels and bars cater for tourists and residents, and motels arrange for tourists to be picked up from the aerodrome by car.

In attempting to clarify the exact source of the name ‘Coober Pedy’, we need to take into account that Coober Pedy itself is generally considered to be traditional Arabana country by senior Anangu (‘Western Desert people’), although Western Desert Kukata and Yankunytjatjara also have ties to the region, particularly the ceremonial sites of the Breakaways of the Stuart Range. Arabana is a Karnic language. The three main Arabana dialects traditionally spoken were Piltapalta (south of Macumba), Wangakakupa (Anna Creek), and Midlaliri (Stuart Range area). Arabana people now mainly live in Port Augusta and Marree and a very small group of senior people have detailed knowledge of one of the three original Arabana dialects (Wangakakupa). The last speaker of Midlaliri, Sam Warupa from Coober Pedy, died in the 1940s (ibid) and much historical, cultural and linguistic knowledge is likely to have passed away with him.

The expansion of Western Desert speakers

It is well-known in relation to Indigenous Australian history that there have been migratory waves of Pitjantjatjara and other Western Desert groups eastwards and southwards at least from the early 1900s to the 1940s. These shifts may have taken place since the 1830s and five phases of later population movements have been outlined by Peggy Brock:

there was a movement south to Ooldea and the transcontinental railway line from 1917 to the 1940s; Ngaanyatjarra speakers in the late 1920s moved from the Warburton Ranges and the Gibson Desert in Western Australia to Laverton, Mount Margaret, Kalgoorlie and Wiluna; by 1921 Antikirinya were moving east from Granite Downs to the Oodnadatta area, and Yankunytjatjara from the Everards were also moving east; and in the area they previously occupied came the Pitjantjatjara from the Mann and Tonkinson Ranges.

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3 Hercus 1994.
At least some of these movements were motivated by a need to escape drought and associated hardship. Regionally, Western Desert variants have expanded, eventually resulting in relatively stable populations of Western Desert speakers in Oodnadatta, Coober Pedy, Port Augusta, and at Yalata on the west coast.6

In addition, as Anangu from the west arrived in increasing numbers many people from Arabana and other groups (including to some extent Western Desert people) died as a result of introduced disease.

Traditionally the eastern neighbours of Yankunytjatjara and Antikirinya, the Lower Arrernte and Arabana groups seem to have been severely affected by the influenza epidemic of 1919–1920.7 Outbreaks of whooping cough and polio at Oodnadatta in the 1930s coincided with tuberculosis. At the time, several groups of Anangu (in this case Pitjantjatjara) of the Petermann Ranges laboured under a three-year long drought lasting until 1939, forcing them to move away from the Ranges to find water and food. Many had died in the attempt.8 In 1936 it was estimated that there were 500 ‘Aborigines’ living in the Petermann Ranges, whereas a medical patrol in 1939 found only 26. The medical patrol, which included TGH Strehlow, Dr Duguid and a tracker (‘native guide’), crossed the Ranges at five points and travelled as far west as to the border of Western Australia, but found only ‘five men, eight women, one old woman and twelve children’.9 In addition, the measles epidemic in 1948 is said to have killed a combined number of nearly 100 Indigenous people around Oodnadatta, Granite Downs, Mimili and Ernabella, although the actual number of deaths may have been higher.10 There is a lack of precise data for the more remote regions, that is outside the locales mentioned above, but Rani Kerin mentions that the measles epidemic of 1948 may have resulted in as many as 50 people dying at Ernabella, and ‘many hundreds more in the surrounding region’.11

These experiences must have been horrific for people witnessing so many of their family members pass away. It is difficult to ascertain how these processes were interpreted but it is clear from Antikirinya elders’ information provided to me in 2003 that two ceremonies were discontinued in the 1940s. This may have been due to introduced disease being calibrated into the ever-present, fundamental realm of spirits and magic, to the extent that the ceremonies were seen as being major parts of the problem (performances may to some extent have been seen as activating the disease) and consequently stopped as a survival measure.12 In

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6 Some of the migrations after the 1940s are mentioned in Long 1989.
7 Hercus 1994: 22; Basedow, 1921, ‘Report upon the Third Medical Relief Expedition among the Aborigines of South Australia’, handwritten manuscript, State Records of South Australia, GRG 23/1 1921 330: 4–5.
8 Kerin 2006: 89.
11 Kerin 2006: 94.
12 See Naessan 2004 for an analysis of these processes.
a more general sense, what data such as these suggest is that there have been a number of processes in place which have altered the pre-contact situation of the wider region of which Coober Pedy is a part.

Sites and settlements

Before entering into a discussion of the variant etymologies one should bear in mind that what is today the township of Coober Pedy may not originally have had one corresponding name – in fact, that would appear to be implausible, since pre-contact naming praxis of the wider region is focused on specific ritually significant sites that are parts of ancestral tracks. Hunter-gatherer groups of the area would seem to fit with the concept of ‘bands’ in the anthropological literature, to the extent that:

bands frequently lack sharp territorial boundaries and their membership changes from season to season, and even day to day, as kinsmen arrive, depart and visit each other over a wide geographical area.13

Stanner outlined an Indigenous ‘ecological life-space’ or domain, divided into the estate (the ‘traditionally recognised locus’ of totem sites, constituted on ritual and genealogical bases) and the range, which were the foraging and hunting areas ordinarily used by the group.14 The estate was normally included in the range, although the two entities were ‘nowhere identical’. A clear distinction between these realms was seen as being scarcely possible to establish concerning good habitats, whereas in more harsh (arid) environments estate and range could be dissociated, that is, ‘considerations of range (especially in protracted drought conditions) might dominate those of estate for as much as a decade’.15

Luise Hercus remarks that ‘Arabana-Wangkangurru people did not think in terms of boundaries; there is in fact no such word in the language’ – the areas where their territory ended and other peoples’ began were mostly gradual.16 However, when the term wadlhu (‘ground, sand, soil, earth, country’) is used with a possessive – anthunha wadlhu, ‘my country’ – it denotes a specific area with which the speaker has a strong ritual affiliation, or in Stanner’s terminology, an estate.17

The way senior Anangu (‘Western Desert people’) speak about their own or other ethno-linguistic groups’ territories seems to consistently lack clear boundaries – typically, a directional term is used (kakarara, ‘east’, wilurara, ‘west’, and so on), and when more specific regions are singled out senior Anangu will, virtually without exception, point towards what I would refer to as one or more ‘core’

13 Harris 1971: 225.
14 Stanner 1965: 2–3, 12. Many thanks to one anonymous referee for mentioning this source.
15 Stanner 1965: 2.
16 Hercus 1994: 15.
17 Hercus 1994: 15. I am grateful to one anonymous referee for drawing my attention to this Arabana expression.
localities – either old camping grounds associated with waterholes or more permanent post-contact localities (these are all ‘sites’, ‘areas’, ‘places’, that is referred to as *ngura*). In cases where other groups’ territories are explicitly referred to *vis-à-vis* Yankunytjatjara areas, a commonly occurring term is *kampa kutjupa* (‘the other side’), indicating the ‘other side’ of a mountain range, encampment or other locality. I believe that if one were to speak of ‘boundaries’ at all, one would quickly find that they overlap. The impression I have gained from many discussions with Anangu throughout the years is that what many *walypala tjuta* (‘whitefellas’) seem to regard as central, the concept of ‘boundaries’ or ‘borders’, is virtually non-existent or at best peripheral for traditionally-oriented Anangu.18

It would appear that principles of land tenure among Arabana and Western Desert peoples differed somewhat: for the most part, neighbouring groups of Arabana and Wangkangurru could freely come to partake in ceremonies, ‘whereas rights for foraging were far more intricate in that amongst the Arabana and Wangkangurru there were strict rules governing where people were allowed to forage’.19 The last mentioned rules contrast with a higher degree of fluidity among Western Desert groups, among which ‘it can be impossible for the outside observer to come to “certainty” as to “who exactly” holds which rights in what areas’, consistent with an absence of ‘a single heavily dominant default mechanism for the transmission of rights in country’.20 The principles of land tenure operative in Coober Pedy nowadays seem to be predominantly Western Desert. Thus,

many Yankunytjatjara now claim relationship to Coober Pedy by virtue of being born there (an aspect of the flexibility of birth totemism) and occasionally by referring to the area as constituting *tjamuku ngura* (‘grandfather’s country’), a claim which not only establishes a genealogical link but also stresses the continuity and significance of the traditional kinship system.21

In the Coober Pedy region, one particularly important site for Arabana people traditionally was *Ulyurla Thidna* (‘Woman’s foot’) the hill marking the beginning of the *Warrpa* (‘Storm’) history, on the road to William Creek, supposed to be on the south side of the road when travelling towards William Creek from Coober Pedy.22 Another important site – for Antikirinya people, and most probably also for Midlaliri – is what today is called Ice Cream Hill. In 2003, a senior Antikirinya man told me that Ice Cream Hill originally was *wiil-wiil* (‘restricted’) – about 70 years ago, when he was a young child travelling on foot with his family in

18 Indigenous Australian group boundaries have been researched and debated extensively in Australianist literature, see for example Stanner 1965; Peterson 1976, 1986; Davis and Prescott 1992; Sutton 1998. Sources relevant specifically to Western Desert fluid group boundaries (chiefly relevant to the question of linguistic boundaries) include Berndt 1959; Douglas 1964; Miller 1971; Douglas 1971; Goddard 1985.
20 Sutton 2001: 16, see also 18–19.
22 Luise Hercus, pers comm February 2010.
the area, the children were not allowed to go there. Non-Indigenous people have lived there for quite some time and as a consequence its ritual significance for Indigenous locals has been eroded. I have not been able to get any more information about this site in so far as Midlaliri traditions are concerned.

A campsite about ten kilometres outside Coober Pedy is predominantly called ‘Ten Mile (Creek)’. There are three other names I have heard used by Yankunytjatjara people but certainly nowhere as often as ‘Ten Mile’ – these are karu kali-kali (‘crooked creek’); karu tjannamatjara (‘the creek bed with wild onions’), and karu tjilpi tjutaku (‘the creek belonging to the elders’). These are all in Yankunytjatjara. Now, two senior Antikirinya men have explained that the name of the place from ‘olden time’ was Karlamarra and that the site belonged to Arabana people in the old days. This name has not been explained by Antikirinya to me but may well include the Arabana karla (‘creek’), and marra (‘new’), literally ‘new creek’.23 This site clearly has ceremonial significance for various Western Desert groups today.

As seen above, at least to some extent Midlaliri names and sites (estates) are known, and considered significant, by senior Antikirinya people. Considering the migrations of Western Desert people mentioned above, one would perhaps be inclined at face value to view shared traditions between Western Desert and other groups as more of a comparatively recent phenomenon. After Western Desert people established themselves in more or less permanent settlements in regions east and south-east of their heartlands, succession processes through which Arabana customary law knowledge was handed over to Western Desert people are indicated to have taken place east of Coober Pedy, in the Oodnadatta area.24 However, at least some traditions were arguably shared among different ethnolinguistic groups also in a pre-invasion setting.

The tracks of some of the ancestral beings offer very interesting glimpses into some cultural patterns shared among various ethnolinguistic groups. It is not my intention to map out ancestral or other tracks in any exhaustive manner here, merely to draw attention to the fact that at least some of the ancestral tracks were and remain parts of larger wholes.

The Wildcat Dreaming or the Native Cat song cycle:

covers a 3000-kilometre journey from Port Augusta on the coast of South Australia to Arnhem Land on the coast of the Northern Territory, appearing intermittingly in the oral traditions and ceremonial song cycles of various dialect and language groups.25

This song cycle is known by Antikirinya and Yankunytjatjara women, and was also reportedly known by Arabana and Arrernte, to mention but a few groups.26

23 The information about marra has been given by Luise Hercus, pers comm November 2009.
24 See particularly Shaw and Gibson 1988: 184, a heritage report from Oodnadatta.
26 Hercus 1994: 11.
Another example of a track that extensively crosses linguistic groups is that of the Seven Sisters Dreaming, known as *ukaralya* among Antikirinya and Yankunytjatjara, and as *kungkarangkalpa* among Pitjantjatjara groups. Daisy Bates recorded its existence among Thura-Yura Wirangu (on the far west coast of South Australia) under the name *yugarilya*. It is known as *arralkwe* in northern/eastern Arrernte, and as *arrarrkwe* in eastern/central Arrernte. The central trait throughout is that seven sisters were chased by a man, and that they eventually escaped into the sky, where they can be seen today as the Seven Sisters star constellation.

The Western Desert groups and the Karnic-speaking Arabana of the western Lake Eyre basin differed from each other in culture, social systems and traditions but there was exchange and some joint traditions – the Emu song-cycle, containing much Western Desert material, comes from the central Simpson Desert (Wangkangurru country), ‘through the area of Shellpatch Bore and then goes over to Mt Chandler where it is continued by Western Desert people and taken far to the west’. It is also worth mentioning that from what I have been told by Antikirinya elders, any person travelling across an area would be expected as a matter of course to stay away from restricted sites – also today, among traditionally-oriented Antikirinya and Yankunytjatjara, people are often reluctant to go around in an uninhabited area unknown to them, since they could be in danger of entering dangerous areas. In some areas, ogres or evil spirits (*mamu*) would cause harm, there could also be severe punishment meted out by the much-feared ‘featherfoot’, *tjina karpil* (‘bound feet’), also called *kutatji*, the Law executioner. It is still considered imperative to know where you can go, where it is ‘safe’, and these sensitivities are likely to have been stronger in the past. In a hunter-gatherer economy people would at times have to travel considerable distances for water and food (even into areas associated with other groups), especially during hard times. Thus, at least in principle, the symbolic and the pragmatic seem to have been intertwined – to have knowledge of ancestral tracks and sites was far from optional, it appears to have been central to staying unharmed and alive.

More to the point concerning the area under consideration here, and as we shall see below, the Stuart Range was a pre-contact meeting place for Arabana and Western Desert speakers, in part reflected in linguistic borrowing from within the Western Desert language into Arabana.

**An Arabana name? Kupa as ‘uninitiated man’ extended to ‘whitefella’**

Rena Briand, a French visitor to Coober Pedy who wrote a book about her time there, holds that:

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Coober Pedy is the bastardisation of the Arabana dialect for Kupa (or Goober), meaning male child or adult who has not been initiated by rites of circumcision and sub-incision, plus Piṭi, meaning cavity in the ground.30

This version of the etymology maintains that the Arabana term *kupa* became used for white people (since they were and are generally not initiated men), whence came the popular translation of ‘white man in a hole’.31 Briand is not a linguistic source, and it is unclear to what extent the author spoke or understood anything of the Indigenous vernaculars. However, it is clear that she consulted a number of Indigenous people, and the source is included here because it corresponds to some extent with other sources.

The version *kupa-piti* ‘boys’ waterhole’ is recorded by Manning in his index of South Australian history but without any reference as to the source of the name.32 ‘Boys’ waterhole’ is certainly also a feature of what one could call ‘wikipedia scholarship’ and similar meanings are frequent on the internet – however, as etymologies, they are inadequate. Many internet references, Manning included, simply mention that Coober Pedy is a ‘corruption of the Aboriginal kupa-piti’. What ‘Aboriginal’ refers to is left unstated, which obfuscates matters considerably.

Noting that the exact source of the ‘youngfella – hole in the ground’ version is absent, Briand’s etymological sketch also conflates *kupa* ‘young’, ‘little’, or ‘youngfella’ with ‘uninitiated man’, but ‘uninitiated’ is a special term in Arabana, *karuwali*. Luise Hercus has told me that throughout her work with Arabana people she never heard *kupa* ‘young, little’ used to mean ‘uninitiated’.33

Finally, none of the people with Arabana background I have spoken to in Coober Pedy (and no Anangu) have mentioned any other etymology than ‘white man’s hole’, which brings us to the Kukata etymology.34

Coober Pedy – Kukata for ‘white man’s hole’

‘Coober Pedy’ is commonly held to be a name from Kukata; a Western Desert lect no longer spoken extensively in the community (the name for the people and language is also spelt Kukatha or Gugada).35 *Kupa piti* is typically said to mean

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31 The earliest written reference to ‘white man in a hole’ may be in The Argus: ‘local legend has it that “Coober” is aboriginal [sic] for “white man” and “Pedy” means “hole in the ground”’ (Robert H Croll, ‘The middle of Australia – opal nights – some Coober Pedy memories’, The Argus, 18 August 1934: 4). I am grateful to one anonymous referee for alerting me to this source and to the National Library’s newspapers website.
32 The Manning Index of South Australian History, nd.
33 Luise Hercus, pers comm November 2009.
34 These people with Arabana background are English speakers or, less commonly, speakers of Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara.
35 The Kukata origin of the name has been mentioned several times to me by local Anangu from 1999 onwards, including Antikirinya man kamugu David Crombie and the late Ngunti-
‘whitefella – hole in the ground’, or, according to John Platt, ‘whitefellows’ holes’, or *guba bigi*, ‘white man’s holes’. Several other sources are considerably more vague as to the origin of the name. On the District Council of Coober Pedy’s website, the name reportedly comes from ‘the Aboriginal words “Kupa Piti” ([sic], meaning white man’s hole or waterhole.’ In *The Canberra Times*, 4 November 1926 the following sketch is provided: ‘the name Coober Pedy is an aborigine [sic] one and means “Man living in ground”’. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April 1954 mentions that ‘Coober Pedy is well named. It is an aboriginal [sic] term for “white man in a hole”’. A more extended descriptive tag (which includes ‘live’) is found in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 May 1954: ‘as a name for their settlement the opal diggers of central South Australia chose two aboriginal [sic] words, “Coober Pedy” – “white man live [sic] underground”’. ‘Aboriginal words’, as indicated above, are of course terms with a considerable lack of clarity. What is of importance here is that the etymology sketched as ‘white man’s hole’ seems well established in the public realm.

Rena Briand indicates that the place was officially named Coober Pedy at a miners’ meeting in 1920. This is supported by Jessie Lennon, a Matu-Yankunytjatjara woman who includes an extract from the Progress Committee meeting from June 1920 in her autobiography. The name ‘Coober Pedy’ was selected by a vote of 16 non-Indigenous miners.

Jessie Lennon explains the name in the following way (orthography as in the original):

Some whitefella must have asked some womens or mans, ‘What now? What do you call these diggings?’

Must have asked we-fellas here – old Tottie mob, George Turner. ‘Oh, we say “Piti kupaku white mans” hole.’

They must have been writing something down too, I reckon, and it came out, ‘Coober Pedy.’

George Turner was born in the Woomera area and was most probably one of the last fluent speakers of Kukata. He was in his seventies when John Platt recorded him in 1966. The reference to ‘old Tottie mob’ is no doubt involving one of his daughters, Tottie.

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37 District Council of Coober Pedy, nd.
41 Briand 1971: 18.
42 Lennon 2000: 46.
43 Lennon 2000: 47.
44 Platt 1972: 3.
'White man in a hole', or 'whitefella – hole in the ground' makes perfect sense as a descriptive neologism (albeit drawing on and based on Indigenous linguistic resources) in the context of mining – so the etymology seems to be referring to processes occurring after 1915, whereas traditional meanings from totemic ancestral tracks of the Midlaliri people are absent.

Was this how it happened, then?

As seen above, the group of miners in 1920 apparently at least asked some local Indigenous people about what they called the diggings before the miners settled on an ‘official’ name. Some or all of the miners may have had a genuine interest in getting to know the original name at the time, alternatively, they wanted a term reflecting the mining activity there (this, in fact, is what Lennon’s account above says). In any case, they (or some of them) seem to have wanted a name from an Indigenous vernacular.

The Kukata utterance in the excerpt above is Piṭi kupaku, consisting of piṭi (‘hole, quarry’), and kupa (‘whitefella’), followed by –ku, a possessive marker. If the above etymology is correct, then the original utterance certainly has been simplified and significantly altered – in kupa piṭi, the word order is changed and there is no possessive suffix. Why did it not simply become recorded as something akin to ‘Pedy Cooberku’?

Possibly because the miners either consciously altered it or otherwise simply got it wrong. Another option is that what they were told by Kukata people was not actually piṭi kupaku. More will be said about this below. For now, a closer look at the individual segments kupa and piṭi is warranted.

A closer examination of the Kukata terms kupa ‘whitefella’ and piṭi ‘quarry’

Kupa – Aboriginal English gubba from ‘government (man)’?

From the 1860s onwards to about 1920, South Australian Pidgin English spread north and west via walypala pastoral activity, The Overland Telegraph, The Great Northern Railroad and the Trans-Australian Railway. From what is sometimes called ‘Cattle Station English’, Western Desert languages got loanwords like numbers (eg puupala, ‘four’ + ‘fellow’), items like makati (‘musket’, ‘rifle’) and pulawa (‘flour’), and certain verbs (eg kauntam, ‘count’, payam, ‘pay /buy’, alpam, ‘help’), still actively used by senior and middle-aged Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara speakers in Coober Pedy, Amata, Ernabella and other locales. The same applies to a limited number of borrowings arriving via ‘Station English’ or Pidgin that reportedly originate in Kaurna, a Thura-Yura language originally spoken in the Adelaide Plains region. These include Kaurna nantu (an extension of male kangaroo) → Yankunytjatjara/Pitjantjatjara nanytju (‘horse’),

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45 Foster et al 2003: xi–xii.
Kaurna *wodli* (‘hut’ extended to ‘house’) $\rightarrow$ Yankunytjatjara/Pitjantjatjara *walji* (‘house’).\(^{46}\) Mukatja or mukuati (Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara for ‘hat’) probably also originally comes from Kaurna *mokarta* (‘head’).\(^{47}\)

In his discussion of structural and lexical features of Aboriginal English, phonetician Andrew Butcher mentions that among one of the most widespread words for non-Indigenous people is ‘*gubba*’ (used throughout south-eastern Australia; probably originating from “government (man)’’).\(^{48}\) Could this be the source of the Kukata term for ‘whitefella’?

The answer is: most probably not. For one thing, the regional scope indicated by Butcher lies well outside the Coober Pedy region, although this does not by itself exclude it from consideration, since words may travel over considerable distances. However, noting that *kupa* as pronounced by Kukata speakers in Platt’s 1966 recordings (see below) is dissimilar from the pronunciation of ‘*gubba*’, there is no good explanation available for an ostensive transition from the low central to the high back vowel.

**The Parnkalla *kupa* (‘ghost, white’) borrowing in Kukata**

How *kupa* became used in Kukata for ‘whitefella’ has been mentioned previously by Luise Hercus and Vlad Potezny, and my following treatment expands on their article by specifically assessing data from Kukata sources.\(^{49}\) *Kupa* is, virtually without any doubt, a relatively recent borrowing into Kukata from some other language. Judging from Platt’s recordings of Kukata speakers in 1966, *kupa* only refers to ‘whitefella’ (for example in one recording Hilda Murray says ‘we don’t say whitefella, we say kupa’).\(^{50}\) The Kukata word for ‘white’ was *piyun*, according to Moonie Davies, one of Platt’s main informants.\(^{51}\) This term is no

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\(^{46}\) Amery 2000: 87, 92. See also Foster et al 2003: xx.

\(^{47}\) Goddard 1996: 79.

\(^{48}\) Butcher 2008: 636. It is worth mentioning Medway in this context, as he holds that Coober Pedy ‘is from an aboriginal [sic] word “kupa piṭi”, which originally meant “boys waterhold” [sic], but is more popularly known to mean “white man in a hole” or “whitefellow burrow”, for obvious reasons. The aboriginal [sic] words “kupa piṭi” are not thought to be local aboriginal [sic] words, but an aboriginal [sic] dialect from somewhere in Western New South Wales and was known by a former White Cliffs miner’ (Medway 1989: 8). This version of the etymology cannot be validated and is most probably incorrect (as pointed out to me by an anonymous referee who also drew my attention to an earlier version of Medway’s work). It is possible that the above version has emerged as a conflation of the Aboriginal English term ‘*gubba*’ and the semantics of the Arabana term *kupa* (‘youngfella’) but this is not possible to ascertain further. One should note, however, that the reference to the White Cliffs region in New South Wales may be taken to indicate Paakantyi language origin but in Paakantyi ‘boy’ is *parlu* and ‘waterhole’ is *thili̱puru-kiira-na* (Beckett et al 2008: 85, 95, 101, 103), terms significantly dissimilar from *kupa piṭi*.

\(^{49}\) Hercus and Potezny 1999: 175.

\(^{50}\) Platt 1966b, ‘Kokatha (Gugada) language elicitation’, Item no PLATT_J01 – 00230A, Audiovisual Archives, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: 12.34.

doubt cognate with Yankunytjatjara *piyan* and Pitjantjtjara *piranpa*. Moreover, Kukata used *guyirdi* for ‘ghost’, a term shared with and possibly originating in Wirangu.\(^5^2\)

Luise Hercus and Vlad Potezny hold that *kupa* entered Kukata from variants of the Thura-Yura language.\(^5^3\) In Parnkalla and Narangga, *kupa* is ‘ghost’ as well as ‘white’. Parnkalla being one of the ethno-linguistic groups neighbouring Kukata, the term (and its extension ‘whitefella’, but, as documented above, with only this meaning in Kukata) may well have come from Parnkalla.

**Piti ‘quarry’**

There may be a danger in assuming that quarries only appeared in the region after *walypala* miners entered the stage.

*Piti*, according to Luise Hercus, is likely to be a loanword from Western Desert into Arabana-Wangkangurru.\(^5^4\) This term only means ‘quarry’ in Arabana-Wangkangurru, in contrast to the wider semantic range of the Western Desert word, which includes hole or quarry, burrow, and the term is often found in placenames ‘associated with the origin of something’.\(^5^5\) *Piti* apparently became borrowed into Arabana-Wangkangurru as a result of contact between Anangu and Arabana as Anangu travelled from much further west to gain access to stone material from quarries in the Stuart Range. Arabana-Wangkangurru people Luise Hercus worked with stated this repeatedly.\(^5^6\) Obviously, the travels for stone material optimal in the production of stone tools and the associated cross-linguistic contact must have been an established pre-invasion phenomenon (that is, before and unrelated to *walypala* activity in the region).

At least for traditionally oriented Anangu, digging deep in the ground is considered dangerous, since it would disturb spirits residing under the ground and bring about imbalance. It would probably be correct to assume consequently that the Stuart Range quarries were of a different order of magnitude than later *walypala* mining shafts. Having said that, *piti* as ‘quarry’ does fit in with what appears to be significant pre-contact Indigenous activity in the region.

Following on from Hercus’ discussion referred to above, it is clear that *piti* may be found in Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara place names ‘associated with the origin of something’.\(^5^7\) To be more specific, in such constructions, the *piti* segment occurs without any overt grammatical markings – for instance, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara *Kalayapiti* (*kalaya*, ‘emu’), and *kapi piti* (‘soakage, well,

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\(^{5^2}\) Gladys Miller, Kukata and Wirangu speaker, explained the term *guyirdi* to Paul Monaghan in June 2009 at Scotdesco, South Australia. Another source concerning Wirangu is Hercus 2007.

\(^{5^3}\) Hercus and Potezny 1999: 175.

\(^{5^4}\) Hercus 2005: 189, 192, *pirdi* in the original.


\(^{5^6}\) Hercus 2005: 193.

\(^{5^7}\) Goddard 1996: 139, the revised second edition of the Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara dictionary, contains an identical formulation to the 1987 version of the dictionary used by Hercus.
waterhole’ – kapi, ‘water’). In the case of kupa piti, it is not clear to what extent the origin of whitefella miners is reflected in the name. Kupa piti is a noun compound behaving grammatically in a similar way to the English ‘opal mine’, or the placename ‘Germantown’ in Victoria. The first and second nouns are not necessarily connected but are lumped together as it were so that one modifies the other without any additional overt grammatical devices. There seems to be nothing to indicate that kupa piti is a simplified form of pitî kupaku. Lennon’s account could be read as a description of the quarries associated with and produced by miners, with a possessive but without overt marking of plural (pitîmûrka kupaku could otherwise have been applicable, -murka being a plural marker in Kukata). Alternatively, the version pitî kupaku resulted from a back translation: from the original kupa piti the whitefella English rendering in the sources are ‘whitefellow’s holes’, ‘white man’s holes’, or ‘white man’s hole’, all of these with the English ‘s’ signifying possession, also present in Lennon’s account. ‘Whitefella hole’ might be the best English approximation of kupa piti, with an implied connection between the words without any overt grammatical treatment. However, since the English renderings fairly consistently employ a marker of ownership, it is hopefully not too far-fetched to suggest that the possessive marker –ku in pitî kupaku reflects a translation of the whitefella English rendering into the assumed original Kukata expression.

Concluding remarks

Coober Pedy is frequently said to originally be Arabana country by senior Anangu, or ‘Western Desert people’. Although the current name by most accounts is from Kukata, ‘Coober Pedy’ as ‘white man’s hole’ is evidently reflective of mining activities of a scale which only commenced after 1915 in the region. Here we have an interesting example of a name Indigenous in form and with a post-contact meaning, wherein references to the local Indigenous custodians are absent.

On the balance of all the evidence, taking into account contemporary Indigenous local opinions and archival sources, it would seem that the most straightforward solution to the etymology of Coober Pedy is that the name is a Kukata lexical ‘loan blend’ composed of Parnkalla-originating kupa (as ‘whitefella’) and Kukata

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58 Goddard 1996: 139.
59 Hercus and Potezny 1999: 175.
60 ‘Whitefellows’ holes’ is found in Platt 1968: 1. ‘White man’s holes’ is found in Platt 1972: 1. ‘White man’s hole’ is from the District Council of Coober Pedy website, and ‘white mans’ hole’ is the version in Lennon 2000: 47.
(Western Desert) *piti* (‘quarry’).\(^{61}\) By including Kukata data, this etymology previously suggested by Luise Hercus and Vlad Potezny (see above) seems to have been confirmed.

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Book Reviews


This book is a complex biography, scrupulously researched both through written records, recorded interviews and the author’s 21-year personal acquaintance, friendship and professional involvement with Joy Janaka Wiradjuri Williams as a member of Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation. I had read the book before being asked to review it and found its lyricism, thoughtfulness and method of biography in chronological reverse compelling and highly readable. I read it first in two long extended chunks hardly able to put it down.

Re-reading it to review was harder. By using dialogue and imaginative reconstructions the biography has a rare and moving immediacy. Re-reading meant having to revisit the bureaucratic envelope, sealed in the hush of an office, that affected an entire infancy, childhood and adult life. It meant hearing again the ‘plok’ of a tennis ball on gut strings in a spacious north Sydney home, juxtaposed with a silent Aboriginal domestic servant from Cootamundra, powerless to keep her unborn child. It meant reading again the step forward taken by Joy’s mother Doretta at their first meeting since infancy, to slap her in the face: ‘Why didn’t you come and see me before?’ As Peter Read explains ‘The method here offers a way to graphically present the apocalyptic, headlong, breathless nature of Joy’s difficult life. Poet and artist that she was I think she would have appreciated it too’ (p. xxiv). The method works and the biography has, at times, harrowing impact.

Read, first met Joy in 1985, when as a staff member of Link-Up, he accompanied her to meet her Indigenous family for the first time. In 2001 she asked him to write her biography but it was not until her death in 2006 that he felt able to complete and publish the manuscript. Underlying the gestation of this book is the author’s unease with her difficult and often abrasive persona. ‘Perhaps everyone who loved Joy Janaka Wiradjuri Williams remained a little apprehensive of her emotions, even her personality, which could change so fast. I share that fierce ambiguity’ (p. xxxiii). This ‘fierce ambiguity’ is for me an authentic departure in the field of Indigenous Australian life-story. Here is recognition that oppression does not simply create long-suffering subjects with vital counter-narratives to national stories of mateship, progress and the old ‘fair go’.

I wanted to convey my own feelings about her … I wanted to show that the circumstances forced upon her and her family by Australia’s hateful
policies of children removal shaped, hurt and warped her, until finally she came to prefer her own loneliness, addiction and pain to sharing it with others. (p. xxiv)

The book does not flinch from the paradox of Joy’s personality, her abject victimisation and her own power to hurt others. The two opening quotes from Joy that give the book its title are representative of this core paradox. This is not an easy balance and one that I have not often seen attempted in Aboriginal studies, biography or legal discourse. Difficult, messy, sometimes overwhelmingly painful personal relationships are a legacy of colonialism as surely as are memories of frontier violence. Through a series of court cases Joy sought to get acknowledged that her core equilibrium, her ‘mental health’ had been shocked and damaged by early removal from her mother and subsequent further dislocations, described in the biography. This in turn had an impact on those around her. Weaving her voice through the biography in poems and recorded interviews we get something of a sense of the precarious balance between her subjugation and her personal power.


Damaged beyond healthy
Yet stronger than an army
Of those parsimonious patrons
Of white superiority (p. 143)

In her own poetry Joy Janaka thrived. She was a published poet, with two collections of autobiographical poetry and held a Master of Arts in Creative Literature. She was a longstanding member of Link-Up Aboriginal Corporation. She was a mother to her son and finally, in the ways she could be, to her daughter. Flawed and furious and fully alive to her suffering having extricated herself from ‘deep substance abuse’ (p. xxxiii) we learn of a complex woman of courage.

The ‘stolen child of another stolen child’ (p. xxii) Joy was taken from her mother at birth and put in the Bomaderry children’s home when three weeks old. Her mother attempted to visit her there on a number of occasions whereupon she was removed again to the Lutanda Home to assimilate along with the non-Aboriginal children there. She was subsequently denied all contact with her mother. The biography charts in reverse the promise and potential of the young girl, ‘she often surprises us with her questions, she is so grown up’ (p. 130), to a teenager disassembled by loss, loneliness, monotony and grief. After an entire infancy and childhood of institutionalisation we find Joy as a young woman alone on the streets of Sydney. Here her creative energy, youthful femininity and intelligence are prostituted and then co-opted by a cult run by Rowie Norton ‘The Witch of Kings Cross’. She is involved as a squatter with the Green bans
movement in Victoria Street, Sydney, arrested ‘for an offence which morally then
and now seems not to have been an offence at all’ (p. xxiv) and pushed back into
institutional ‘care’ at the Rozelle Psychiatric Centre.

Rather than seek to present a continuous narrative the biography is a series of
key ‘scenes in the life’. Read’s decision to use direct speech, partly reconstructed
scenes and a reverse chronology raise profound questions about the points at
which historical narratives begin and about the functions that history serves.
The book’s reverse chronology reminded me of work by historians and
anthropologists in Latin America. Olivia Harris’ work on the experience of
historical rupture and periodisation among the Aymara-speaking people of the
Andes for example, shows that official or colonial versions of what constitutes a
‘rupture’ or a turning point and hence periodisation more generally, often have
little bearing on local or Indigenous interpretations. This work, as does Read’s
biography, raises broader questions about temporality and perspective, and
unsettles and defies easy answers about official versions of the past.

Something I have found inspiring in Peter Read’s previous work is the premise
that history is not inevitable. Choices are made, attitudes are formed, the course
of an individual or community’s life is irrevocably altered. This biography holds
this premise throughout. Along with the images of the infant to the woman on
the cover of the book we are invited through the form of the book, its scenes
and reverse chronology to imagine other possibilities in the life of a creative,
intelligent woman. The book, like Joy’s life and sudden and untimely death,
shows the traumatic legacy of loss that Joy, her mother, her grandmother and
her extended family lived with and that those that survive her today continue
to deal with.

Gordon Briscoe’s preface to the book states ‘all courses on Aboriginal affairs
should place documents like this on student reading lists’. I agree and think that
all readers in Australia could learn about our shared past, present and future by
sitting with these often disturbing scenes in a life. The final words in the book
are excerpted from Joy Williams v The Minister, 1999. In this closing paragraph
we see how the lines between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ are blurred not just by inventive,
compassionate historians but by lawyers too. Legal fictions, like foundational
myths, can be created from a lack of understanding of Indigenous and other
marginalised experiences. I hope the inspired method and content of these
‘scenes in a life’ will go some way to increasing that understanding.

Anna Cole
Goldsmiths College
University of London
In *Daisy Bates: Grand Dame of the Desert*, Bob Reece presents a concise overview of the life and work of Daisy Bates. Based on research performed with the assistance of a Harold White Fellowship at the National Library in 2005, Reece draws ‘from Bates’ letters as well as her published writings to demonstrate their potential to illustrate her work and her life’ (p. 5). According to Reece, Bates was a prolific letter writer – ‘upwards of 3000 of her letters are extant’ (p. 5) – so there is plenty of material from which to draw to inform this work (unfortunately she torched her diaries and a significant portion of her personal correspondence dating back to 1899). His aim is to produce an account so that ‘readers may gain some idea of her motivations and beliefs, and of what kind of person she was’ (p. 10). Tellingly, after wading through much of this material, Reece finds that while his admiration for her qualities of determination, intelligence and endurance has increased, his opinion of Bates as a person has not: ‘she reveals herself on the one hand as a social climber, name-dropper and user of people, a diehard imperial loyalist and an apologist for the Western Australian pastoralists in their treatment of the Aborigines, and on the other as an anti-feminist, anti-socialist, anti-Catholic, anti-German, and so on’ (p. 6). As this material is presented, it is difficult to form an alternative view.

As one who has spent many hours poring over Bates’s manuscripts on language and culture, however, I find that this focus disappointingly leaves unanswered some of the deeper questions faced by those with an interest in the contemporary practical (and political) applications of her work. While Reece gestures towards the rehabilitation of Bates’s reputation as a social scientist particularly in the native title era, I was hoping for something a little more substantial than the mere mention of this. While he refers to the recovery of some of Bates’s writings by Indigenous people in recent times, this falls disappointingly short in detail given the importance of questioning the processes that led to the creation of the colonial archive and the ways and means by which contemporary people are unpacking it, often creating local, digital repositories or archives.

According to Reece, through native title processes Indigenous people might come to see Bates as someone ‘who gave them back part of their lost past’ (p. 156). This is an attempt by Reece to tell the story from the other side, the Aboriginal perspective, and he finishes the book with this sort of redemptive sentiment. What I am lurching towards here is that this feel-good ending masks what I see as a central problem in attempts to use Bates’s writings.

A basic problem for anyone with an interest in applying the writings of Daisy Bates to contemporary contexts is the question of how to evaluate a particular piece of writing against her well-known profligacy with autobiographical truth on the one hand and her claims for producing objective knowledge about Aboriginal people on the other. The first part of this equation might well
collapse if one takes the post-structuralist view of the ‘death of the author’ – it is irrelevant to the value of her writings whether or not she performed a number of fictive selves in public. But what of the relation between Bates’s journalism, which is often steeped in sensationalism, particularly with regard to purported cannibalism, and her field notes? Do we read the journalism as geared towards attention-seeking and self-promotion rather than to any grander purpose? A practice not mentioned by Reece is Bates’s collection and sale of vocabularies to Adelaide cultural institutions in the 1930s. Was this activity ultimately pursued for profit and her own survival? In the type of social science pursued by Bates it is clear that there are interests at play in the production of knowledge; knowledge production is not value-free. While Reece draws attention to the fact that Bates continually held an eye to advantage, particularly toward potential government funding (which rarely arrived), these questions are largely left unresolved and remain part of the Daisy Bates myth.

A corollary to this problem is the high level of interpretation that is required for the use of her materials. There is a palimpsest-like quality to many of her manuscript materials, at times they are mere fragments or like scattered leaves. Ernestine Hill, who assisted Bates in producing *My Natives and I*, a series of articles commissioned and syndicated by *The Advertiser*, describes working with Bates’s ‘hundredweight of copious notes … It was feet deep of jigsaw puzzle, knowledge new to the world, often with Aboriginal words and vocabularies, rituals, racial links, that no one but Daisy could elucidate’ (p. 119). In many ways her archived material, certainly those lodged at the Barr Smith Library, are like this and Radcliffe-Brown’s gibe that her mind was ‘a well-stored knitting basket after half a dozen kittens had been playing there undisturbed’ (p. 7) resounds at times in the archive.

A number of Bates’s writings have played a crucial role in the current Wirangu Language revitalisation project. Her recording made at Yuria waterhole, about 100 kilometres west of Ceduna, South Australia, has been a key text for eliciting linguistic and other aspects of traditional knowledge from the fading memories of two elderly and frail sisters, the last speakers of the Wirangu language. In the Yuria recording (written), Bates recorded language from Minjia, or Lucy Washington, the grandmother of the two remaining speakers. This intergenerational link has figured centrally in generating local interest in pursuing the revitalisation project that has grown from Luise Hercus’s salvage linguistic work in the 1990s.

Having said this, attitudes towards Bates are ambivalent among Aboriginal people on the Far West Coast, South Australia. On the one hand her appalling public attitude towards people of mixed blood, her attempts to control interactions between Blacks and Whites at Ooldea, and her views on the ‘doomed race’ contrast with memories of generosity, such as Daisy giving sweets to mixed blood children at Penong (witnessed by a now elderly woman), and appreciation that she took the time to write language down.
Bob Reece’s book will be an invaluable guide for those who want to follow the ways Bates’s written legacy is reincorporated and transformed back into Indigenous lives.

Paul Monaghan
University of Adelaide
Donald Thomson died in 1970 during the first year I spent with Yolngu at Yirrkala; Lloyd Warner died the same year. I had only recently arrived in Australia from the United States to begin my PhD research, and did not get the opportunity to meet either of them. They were the two anthropologists I had most wanted to meet because of the long periods of time each had spent with Yolngu people in Arnhem Land (Warner 1927–1929 and Thomson 1935–1943). Their publications were the first major published works concerning the Yolngu: they were ethnographically rich, and I found them riveting. Moreover, because Thomson and Warner had been in Arnhem Land during a period in which Yolngu society and culture remained relatively undisturbed by alien incursion, their work was of the greatest importance in understanding Yolngu history and the situation of Yolngu leaders who subsequently faced the prospect of a huge mining development on their land.1

Warner died on 23 May 1970; the University of Chicago held a memorial service for him, and his wife and daughter scattered his ashes, as he had wished, on Coyote Mountain in Borrego Springs, near San Diego, California.2 Thomson died on 12 May 1970 and on 19 June 1970 his ashes were scattered over Caledon Bay in eastern Arnhem Land. Djiriny and Maw, Yolngu leaders of the Djapu clan and sons of Wonggu, accompanied the ashes on the airforce aeroplane from which the ashes were scattered. Wonggu was head of the Djapu clan during Thomson’s time at Caledon Bay and Thomson had regarded him with admiration and affection.3

In the preface, Warner says his book on the Yolngu, ‘is the result of three years (1926–1929) spent in Australia in two field trips to Arnhem Land’.4 Thomson, in the only book dealing with Aboriginal society published during his lifetime, says that the work on which it is based was carried out during expeditions ‘in 1935–6–7, under commission by the Commonwealth Government, and in 1941–2–3, while on war service’.5

Thomson and Warner were close in age – Warner was born in 1898 and Thomson was born in 1901. They both studied at Sydney University soon after AR Radcliffe-Brown became the first incumbent of the University’s recently established Chair of Anthropology.6 I thought surely they must have known each other and

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1 In 1969, Professor Stanner told me he thought that Yolngu remained the most intact Aboriginal society in Australia and subsequently I found no reason to question his assessment.
5 Thomson 1949: footnote on title page.
engaged in collegial conversation, perhaps even debate, since the proposed field research of each was to be in northern Australia, and that some record of their having met would exist. Although Warner never visited Cape York Peninsula, the possibility of his conducting field research there was briefly considered, and Cape York Peninsula was Thomson’s first field research destination. I hoped that some record of their exchanges would add a dimension to my understanding of Yolngu history and diminish to some small degree my disappointment at never having met them. Their written work certainly suggested common areas of interest as well as important differences. The offer to write this review was the impetus to search for evidence of a meeting, but I have so far been disappointed. (My search for some tangible indication of their having interacted with one another is my excuse for tardiness in reviewing a book which those of you who read this review no doubt read long ago.)

In their published works, Thomson’s references to Warner are exiguous, and I have so far found no reference to Thomson in Warner’s publications. Inferences about their personal or scholarly relationship are speculative. The reason for the lack of definite evidence of their meeting, I have concluded, lies in the fact that, although they were both Radcliffe-Brown’s students at Sydney University, they were there at the same time only for a very short period, if at all. Moreover, shortly after his study of the Yolngu, Warner returned to the United States and at the same time appears to have shifted his entire research interest to aspects of contemporary United States society and culture. However, and though rarely mentioned, there is no doubt that Thomson and Warner knew of each other’s research and publications. It is the absence, in one case, and virtual absence in the other, of references to the other’s work, in view of the long periods each had spent in Arnhem Land working with and knowing some of the same people, that seemed a conundrum and provoked me, and some other anthropologists who also spent time in Arnhem Land in subsequent decades, to look from time to time for some indication of their scholarly interaction.

Thomson reminded Radcliffe-Brown in a letter that he was his ‘first Diploma student at Sydney’. He enrolled in the year long diploma course, presumably in March 1927 since he graduated in April 1928, and left immediately after completing the course for fieldwork on Cape York Peninsula. After eight months of fieldwork on Cape York Peninsula, he returned to Melbourne without stopping in Sydney, and in 1929 corresponded with Radcliffe-Brown from Melbourne. Radcliffe-Brown invited Warner to work with him in Australia in

8 This was Thomson’s claim in a letter to Radcliffe-Brown in 1948; Peterson, who writes about the correspondence between Thomson and Radcliffe-Brown between 1948 and 1954, says that Thomson ‘was in the first small cohort of Radcliffe-Brown’s students in Australia, and the first to graduate with the Diploma in Anthropology in 1927’: Peterson 2006: 17.
9 Gray says, ‘On his return from Cape York Peninsula, Thomson passed through Sydney at the end of the year without visiting Radcliffe-Brown’ (p. 85).
and Warner arrived in Sydney in January 1927. He left for fieldwork in Arnhem Land (presumably early) in March, having spent seven weeks studying with Radcliffe-Brown. He returned to Sydney in September 1927 to confer with Radcliffe-Brown and to write and plan future fieldwork. He left for the United States in 1929.

So what is the evidence for the relation between Thomson and Warner? In searching for direct evidence I have consulted only published sources – admittedly a far from exhaustive search – and, as noted above, found no reference to Thomson in Warner’s work and only two references to Warner in Thomson’s work, both in Thomson’s book, *Economic Structure and the Ceremonial Exchange Cycle in Arnhem Land* (1949). In that book Thomson criticised Warner’s use of ‘Murngin’ to refer to the Yolngu:

The arbitrary use of the term *Murngin*, ‘tribe’, for the people of Eastern Arnhem Land, which was introduced by Professor W. Lloyd Warner (*A Black Civilisation*; New York and London, 1937) is particularly unfortunate, for as was pointed out [in a lengthy earlier footnote,] east of Cape Stewart in North Central Arnhem Land tribal organisation is conspicuous by its absence from the intricate social organisation of the area … The word *murngin* has nothing to do with social organisation, and is in no sense the name of a ‘tribe’.

In addition, Thomson’s appraisal of the significance of Yolngu trade with the Macassans is explicitly opposed to Warner’s. Warner concludes that Yolngu society and culture, including trade and exchange, had changed very little as the result of long contact with the Macassans. Thomson, on the other hand, believed that the Macassan voyagers had played a major role in the development of the ‘great ceremonial exchange cycle’ in the Yolngu area, and argued that:

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11 M Warner 1988: 1. Warner’s widow gives this account (perhaps retold many times) of the invitation: In May 1926 in Berkeley at a dinner meeting where Radcliffe-Brown was the honoured guest, Radcliffe-Brown ‘called down the table to Warner, then a graduate student, “I say, Warner, how would you like to come to Australia with me? … If you are interested let’s get together and talk.”’


13 Thomson 1949: 11.

14 Warner, however, said that he used ‘Murngin’ only as a convenient label: ‘the tribe can hardly be said to exist in this area … The people do not think of themselves under this name or classification. The word has been used by me as a general term for all of the eight tribes in the area and for the groups of people located in the central part of the territory of the eight tribes. I have seized upon this name as a convenient and concise way of talking about this whole group of people; had any of the other tribes who possess the particular type of social organization found in this area been located in the center of the group, I should have used the name of that tribe rather than Murngin.’ Warner 1958: 15 n2.


Professor Warner has missed entirely the tremendous importance of the impact of this Indonesian culture on the ceremonial life of these people in his review of Malay or Macassar contacts with the people of Arnhem Land...

There is no justification for the conclusion that the culture of the natives of Northeastern Arnhem Land showed a resistance to the influence of this virile culture from Indonesia, and certainly none for the statement that the ideas of these people were no different from what they were before he (the Malay seafarer) arrived...

There is little doubt that a ceremonial exchange system existed in Arnhem Land before the coming of the visitors from Indonesia ... but its orientation at the present time, and its most important ‘drives’ certainly owe much to the impact of Indonesian culture...

From Thomson’s references to Warner in *Economic Structure and the Ceremonial Exchange Cycle*, noted above, it is reasonable to infer that he believed his interpretations of other aspects of Yolngu society and culture differed significantly in many respects from Warner’s. Consistent with this inference, a letter Thomson wrote in 1937 contains implied criticism of Warner’s analysis of Yolngu society:17

The social grouping here is a mystery. It was studied in part by a previous worker who went astray I think in trying to fit it in to the known scheme of things – to try to discover an ideal and who was not content to study the scheme as it is in operation, to see the effects of this in various peoples and under varied conditions. (Peterson pp. 42, 44 fn 19)

Although as noted, Warner makes no published reference to Thomson,18 Mildred Warner’s19 description of a seminar that led to discussion of ‘the Murngin controversy’ may have included mention of Thomson’s work:

When the Berndts visited England in 1954 while Lloyd was teaching at Cambridge, a seminar was held in Meyer Fortes’ rooms at Kings College. It was agreed in advance that the subject of Australian kinship would be avoided if possible, but of course this could not be. Edmund Leach attacked the Berndts with such force that everyone mustered to their defense. Australian kinship systems had lost none of their emotion.

Even though Thomson and Warner were in Sydney at the same time, their only obvious link was Radcliffe-Brown, who appears to have had a very different

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17 Letter in Mrs Dorita Thomson’s possession.
18 A number of accounts have been given to explain why none of Warner’s field notes survive. His widow writes, ‘When I went to my husband’s offices at Michigan State University to remove his files in early fall of 1970, nothing remained – banks of files accumulated through forty years had disappeared’ (Warner 1988: vii). Although university officials instigated a search that included the building, the archives, and Warner’s first offices, his widow decided to write a biography of Warner, apparently assuming that the files would never be found.
relationship with each man. Almost immediately after Warner arrived in Sydney from the United States, Radcliffe-Brown was praising him, and he and Warner became close friends.20 And when Warner returned to Sydney after his first seven months of fieldwork, he and a friend shared an apartment with Radcliffe-Brown.21 On the other hand, Radcliffe-Brown was very critical of Thomson’s interests and his potential as an anthropologist at the beginning of their association.22 It was only much later and in correspondence (Peterson this volume and 2006) that Thomson’s desire for Radcliffe-Brown’s friendship appeared to be reciprocated.23

The question of the relationship between Thomson and Warner (or lack of it) and of those between Radcliffe-Brown and Thomson and Warner is historically significant because of Thomson’s nominal adherence to Radcliffe-Brown’s model of Aboriginal social structure, and, probably related to that, his failure to engage directly with Warner’s Yolngu material. Because of the vast amount of Thomson’s ethnographic data on Yolngu and their quality, anthropologists inevitably have asked why he did not publish them. Peterson has suggested what seems a plausible explanation for Thomson’s not publishing his data, namely Thomson’s ‘isolation from other anthropologists and relationship with Radcliffe-Brown’ (p. 42).

The nature and effect of the differences between Warner and Thomson might further be divined from unpublished sources including the invaluable Thomson collection in the Museum of Victoria. That collection has been a source of inspiration (in some cases, the main source) for the papers in Donald Thomson, the Man and Scholar, the splendid book edited by Bruce Rigsby and Nic Peterson.

The 16 chapters in Donald Thomson, the Man and Scholar, began as papers presented at the Donald Thomson Centenary Anniversary Symposium held at the University Melbourne in 2001 under the sponsorship of the Museum of Victoria (p. v). The collection is important as the first book-length assessment of the work and intellectual contribution of an individual scholar to anthropology. Yet the editors’ judgement that a ‘full assessment will not be possible for a long time to come because so much of [Thomson’s] research contribution is in the form of unpublished field notes and his vast and magnificent collection of material culture and photographs, most of which has still to receive detailed attention’

22 Radcliffe-Brown explicitly compared Thomson unfavourably to Warner; see Gray this volume (p. 86).
23 Thomson’s need for Radcliffe-Brown’s approval apparently led him to continue to write as though Radcliffe-Brown’s model of Aboriginal social organisation were adequate, while his own data and interpretations consistently revealed the model’s inadequacy. It is a matter of regret that in 1949 Thomson did not respond to Radcliffe-Brown’s recommendation that he contact Stanner, who had promised Radcliffe-Brown to help Thomson: ‘I feel that in Melbourne you are very isolated. Now that Stanner is returning to Australia you might be able to forget your military conflict with him and get together with him on Australian anthropology … If you can succeed in making friendly contact with him you would find him, I think a congenial and helpful colleague. He has one thing in common with you, his appreciation of the blackfellow’ (Peterson 2006: 23).
(p. 1) is clearly borne out. A bonus of the book is reading the interesting dialogue between the editors and the authors that appear in the many ‘Editors’ Note’ endnotes.

The title of the book reflects its focus on the relationship between Donald Thomson as a person and the evolution of his many faceted career. The editors (pp. 2–3) remark in the introductory chapter that a full biography of Thomson remains to be written, and they give only a brief framework (and a timeline pp. 243–244) as a guide to the chapters to ‘provide an understanding of the man and scholar’. The guide is important to bear in mind since the authors of the chapters draw on the results of the activities that engaged Thomson’s professional life and reveal the twinned passions of natural science exploration and collecting that motivated him. The tremendous energy he invested to achieve accuracy and completeness meant that the material objects he collected are meticulously documented and linked to detailed text describing their manufacture and use and sometimes even their history. And Thomson’s observations of Aboriginal life and his recordings of interviews produced an enormous amount of linguistic evidence. The authors of all chapters attend to issues of context as did Thomson and are sensitive to the physical and social environment in which Thomson was working and his interaction with that environment.

A symposium that celebrates a public life inevitably draws contributors who had a special relation to that person and his interests and achievements. In the case of Thomson, the diversity of contributors’ interests reflects the range of Thomson’s, yet I think it is reasonable to see the chapters as falling into four broad categories: ethnography, relations to other anthropologists, and the discipline of anthropology (Chase, Peterson, Gray, Rigsby, Sutton, Borsboom); material culture including photography (Allen, Hafner, Hamby, Memmott and Fantin); advocacy including public education (Attwood, West); and natural history (Yen and Coventry, Temby). One chapter falls outside these categories (Playne on illustrations that five women artists created for Thomson’s material collection). All authors speak of Thomson’s personal involvement with the subject or subjects. In what follows the focus is mainly on the chapters in the first category, which reflects my own proclivities.

Peterson has spent perhaps more time than any other anthropologist has working with the Thomson collection, and that opportunity informs his evaluation of Thomson’s place in Australian anthropology. Peterson (pp. 29–30) frames his survey of Thomson’s work in terms of the three geographic areas in which Thomson undertook field work and in the chief focus of each area: Cape York Peninsula, in which his focus was sociocultural organisation; Arnhem Land, in which his focus was on ecological, economic, and policy topics; and the Central Australian desert area, with a focus on material culture and ecology. Although Thomson’s contributions in each of these areas were substantial,

24 They point to other publications about aspects of Thomson’s work where ‘the main developments, events and features of his career’ have been described.
Peterson concludes that it is the vast collection of material objects, photographs, unpublished manuscripts and field notes, that is the greatest contribution, and that establishes his place in Australian anthropology:

They can only come to be valued more and more highly by both indigenous and non-indigenous people as the years go by. It is in the context of the collection that the minute particulars of his hundreds of pages of fieldnotes come into their own through their close relationship with the objects and images. This relationship will ensure that Thomson’s ethnography will continue to breathe [sic] vitality into anthropological research on the classical cultures and societies of Cape York Peninsula and Arnhem Land for the foreseeable future and that his work will never be forgotten. (p. 43)

Peterson (p. 42), as noted above, also speculates on the reasons why Thomson did not publish or complete for publication his vast corpus of Arnhem Land material on myth, ritual, magic, ceremony, painting and kinship; he suggests that it was principally because Warner published A Black Civilization in 1937, when Thomson was completing his intensive research among the same people on the same topics, thus pre-empting Thomson’s publication of material on the same topics.

In Thomson’s Cape York Peninsula writings, Chase finds his natural science training and interests both in his photographs, which portray ‘natural humanity in seamless interaction with the biophysical environment’ (p. 20), and in ‘his anthropological use of the term “ecology” as early as 1946 … at a time when such interests were only just beginning to be considered in American anthropology’ (p. 21). Somewhat contentiously Chase argues that Thomson’s evolutionary perspective was very close to that of Tylor:25

it is not so much biological Aboriginal humans who are primitive, but their culture. He clearly has a dualistic view of human existence which sees ‘culture’ as an entity which evolves through stages quite separate from biology. [He also sees] northern Cape York Peninsula as an area in possible transition to a higher cultural stage through contacts across the Torres Strait in both the material and social dimensions of culture through selective competitive success. (pp. 25–26)

Thomson was a vocal opponent of assimilation and an early advocate of land rights, and as do the other authors in this collection, Chase finds evidence for Thomson’s regard for Aborigines as ‘real people for whom he had obvious deep affection and respect, and with whom he had great and memorable personal experiences’ (p. 26).

Thomson’s isolation from his Australianist colleagues has been widely noted. Gray (p. 84) says that Thomson’s ‘marginalisation’ in Australian anthropology was the result of his estrangement from the Australian National Research

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25 See, for instance, Editors’ Notes in the endnotes to Chase’s chapter.
Council (ANRC) and his conflict with Professor AP Elkin, who became Chair of the Sydney University’s Anthropology Department in 1933, and he describes three events (which may be seen as series of related events) to substantiate his argument: Thomson’s argument about funds with the honorary secretary of the ANRC, who subsequently was found to have misappropriated ANRC funds and who committed suicide, Thomson’s advocacy of segregation for Aborigines and opposition to a policy of assimilation, and his opposition to Elkin over the Woomera Rocket range. Gray aims to provide a nuanced reading of the conflict between Thomson and Elkin, but the nuancing arguably results in a portrayal of Elkin that is more sympathetic than that provided of Thomson. Gray equates Thomson’s argument for segregation, with its implied focus on remote areas of the Northern Territory, with apartheid, which as policy was adopted only by South Africa, and he seems to overlook the opposed values and aims of the two governments’ actions in relation to their indigenous peoples. By the 1970s Thomson’s argument for the maintenance of Aboriginal identity and culture had become more influential than Elkin’s argument for assimilation.

Thomson’s contribution to anthropological linguistics is substantial, although as consistently remarked with respect to all of Thomson’s work, more for the very large corpus of texts he carefully transcribed than for his linguistic analysis of them. Rigsby, however, remarks that Thomson’s published ‘papers stand out for their attention to the form and function of language and speech in culture and social life’ and that Thomson ‘regarded language learning and recording (that is, transcription and glossing) as an important part of doing ethnography and social anthropology’ (pp. 129, 130).

Rigsby (p. 130) has made the study of the languages of Cape York Peninsula one of his special areas of research, and, as an anthropological linguist, he judges that Thomson’s understanding of Kuuku Ya’u and Umpila improved during the period 1928–1935 and that his transcriptions are reasonable. Rigsby has focused on the linguistic analysis of the difficult Lamalamic language and during the past three decades has spent a great deal of time working with the Lamalala people in the area of Port Stewart as well as constructing a narrative of Thomson’s time and the information he recorded with the people there, which includes unpublished papers, fieldnotes and photographs. Rigsby (pp. 136–139) convincingly exemplifies Thomson’s role as linguistic anthropologist and finds that his ‘fieldnotes … include data and comments bearing on a number of topics which linguistic anthropologists later developed more fully’. Thomson’s ‘innate language-learning ability and feeling for the fuller meanings of what people say to and with one another enabled him to do excellent work on matters of language and speech, despite his lack of formal linguistic training’. Rigsby also points out that recent and current research in native title and related issues has revealed the importance of Thomson’s linguistic and linguistic anthropological work (p. 139). Rigsby’s copious endnotes (p. 140–142) are a delightful coda to his chapter.

Thomson made the first of two short visits to Flinders Island in 1928; during his second visit, in 1935, he recorded linguistic, genealogical, and territorial information from interviews with the few people who remained in a camp on the
island. Sutton’s (p. 148) work on the data that Thomson recorded in connection with his research on the Flinders Island Language segues to noting another purpose Thomson had in writing his findings and to reflect on the relationship that anthropologists have had (and have) with the Aboriginal people they have worked with and become close to and how variously they report their observations in different contexts. Thomson who was appalled by the treatment that Aboriginal people received at the hands of pearlers, sandalwood cutters, missionaries, and pastoralists, and angered at government administrators’ inaction or forced removals, became ‘well known for his criticisms of Aboriginal administrative policy and practice’ (p. 149). Sutton finds a:

consistency between Thomson’s first field observations in 1928 and the recurring pattern of his involvement in later events, right through to his public engagement in moves to reform Aboriginal affairs in Victoria towards the end of his life. (p. 151)

In this regard, Sutton observes both parallels and differences in the responses of McConnel, Mountford and Stanner (pp. 149–154). In a fitting conclusion, Sutton remarks:

[Thomson’s] sensitivity to the grossness of so many men of the outback in the Depression probably cannot be separated out from this general pattern of a fine-tuned sensibility, combined with his passionate hatred of injustice. His political position on indigenous affairs ... arose from a deeply aesthetic appreciation as much as a moral stance. The destruction of Aboriginal culture which he witnessed at first hand entailed the killing of something beautiful, for base motives of gain, or for arrogant proselytising, or for government control. (p. 154)

Thomson remarked in notes he wrote at Gaarrtji in 1937 during his extensive research in Arnhem Land that, ‘If a man could but follow all that takes place when a yarkomirri (important) man dies he would understand almost all of the culture of these people’. At Yirralka in 1969, during mortuary rites for a senior Yolngu man, Daymbalipu Mununggurr told me that I had to understand that ‘death is an important part of Yolngu life’. Boorsboom (p. 160, citing Peterson 1976), who had been at Gaarrtji in the early 1970s and in 1998, quotes Thomson’s fieldnote and says, ‘This observation has lost none of its validity’. I imagine that no anthropologist who has worked in north-east Arnhem Land would dissent, or disagree with Boorsboom’s observation of changes that have occurred – new means of transport and communication, but more significantly shift in emphasis from secondary burial rites in grave posts to ritual at the time of burial including cleansing rituals (p. 161). Boorsboom also found Thomson’s apt descriptions of ‘the dynamics of Aboriginal sociality and the ways people identify themselves in any given context’ remarkable because Thomson was writing when anthropological explanations were cast in terms of the ‘structural-functional language of clans, tribes and languages ... terms that refer to bounded, essentialist and exclusive entities which did not reflect the social reality of Arnhem Land of his time nor the social reality of Arnhem Land today’ (pp. 161, 169).
Thomson’s importance as an advocate for Aboriginal rights in the 1930s and 1940s is counterpoised to Elkin’s role in Aboriginal affairs by Attwood, who also observes that Thomson’s ‘distinctive perspective, unlike Elkin’s, became increasingly influential with the passing of time’ (p. 183). Attwood links Thomson’s advocacy directly to his observing, in 1928, the acts of an autocratic mission superintendent at Aurukun and his frustrated attempts to bring about change. During the years between 1928 and the late 1960s, the political environment in Aboriginal affairs in Australia changed as did receptiveness to Thomson’s advocacy for the maintenance of Aboriginal identity and culture, so that toward the end of his life, ‘political positions he had championed and which had once seemed beyond the pale were moving to centre stage’ (p. 174).

Although Thomson and Warner may never have met and thus never had a conversation about Yolngu, I think that had such an exchange occurred, they would have found they had much in common – and it would have been based on their admiration and affection for the Yolngu people and their culture.

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Bruce Rigsby and Nicolas Peterson are to be thanked for making the proceedings of the symposium available in print. The book is well presented – photographs, as befits a book about Donald Thomson, are splendid (I especially like the one of Thomson on the cover). The Academy of Social Sciences in Australia is to be thanked for undertaking its publication. A couple of quibbles: the binding is not as good as it should be, and copy editing could have been more carefully done. However, neither of these shortcomings seriously distracts from appreciation of the book.

References


Nancy Williams
University of Queensland
Can there be too many books on Aboriginal art? Take the example of one Aboriginal artist John Mawurndjul. He featured significantly in Crossing Country the Alchemy of Western Arnhem Land Art (Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2004), and was the sole subject of another exhibition catalogue ‘Rarrk’: John Mawurndjul: Journey through Time in Australia (Museum Tinguely and C Kauffman (eds), Crawford House Publishing, Belair, South Australia, 2005). Both were substantial books in production values and content. In 2009 Mawurndjul was the subject of another smaller publication, John Mawurndjul: Survey 1979–2009 (Apolline Kohen (curator), ANU Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, 2009), and also of Between Indigenous Australia and Europe: John Mawurndjul, a collection of scholarly essays compiled from a seminar in that accompanied ‘Rarrk’ exhibition at the Museum Tinguely in Basel.

In this case the excess of books is largely due to Mawurndjul’s reputation. A Kuninjku Elder based in the area serviced by Maningrida (Western Arnhem Land), he is the most celebrated contemporary artist from Arnhem Land. The most significant aspect of these four publications is that two of them emanate from Europe, a place that remains sceptical of the Australian artworld’s claims for Aboriginal contemporary art. The contributors to Between Indigenous Australia and Europe are fairly even divided between Australian and European, and the essays by the Europeans reflect the provocative nature of exhibiting Aboriginal art in an esteemed museum of modern art. This engagement between Australian scholars and European artworld on the subject of Aboriginal art is a relatively rare event and the main value of this book.

To appreciate Mawurndjul’s achievement we must remember that in the 1980s and 1990s, as the Aboriginal art industry rapidly developed, the bark painters found it increasingly difficult to compete with the abstract acrylic canvases from the Kimberley and Western Desert communities. This was largely because the desert canvases had shifted the paradigm of Aboriginal art from the ethnographic to the aesthetic, and Arnhem Land bark paintings were too strongly associated with the previous ethnographic paradigm. Mawurndjul was the first bark painter to successfully challenge the hegemony of the Desert and Kimberley styles within the terms of contemporary art.

Between Indigenous Australia and Europe is best read in the context of the two excellent exhibition catalogues, ‘Rarrk’ and Crossing Country. Not only do both have high-quality reproductions (that cannot be matched by Between Indigenous Australia and Europe), their essays are of a high calibre and provide a greater insight into Mawurndjul and his art than the symposium essays.
The symposium essays are divided into four parts, of which the first focuses on Mawurndjul and his art. It begins with essays by Jon Altman and Luke Taylor, two anthropologists with a long experience of Mawurndjul and Kunjinjku art. However you will learn more from their essays in the above exhibition catalogues. Judith Ryan, among the most experienced curators of Aboriginal art, largely repeats the points she makes in ‘Rarrk’, but she does give them a wider Arnhem Land context. Most interesting in this first section is the very different accounts that Ryan and Taylor give of Mawurndjul’s aesthetic, with Ryan taking a very formalist perspective that focuses on the material-specificity of bark painting, and Taylor’s anthropological background embedding Mawurndjul’s aesthetic moves within social contexts.

The remaining three parts of Between Indigenous Australia and Europe, which more accurately reflect the book’s title, are the reason to buy this book. Here the issue is not Mawurndjul’s art but its provocation within the European context – the still very vexed question of how European art historiography can adequately understand let alone critique Indigenous art. The issue, which was embryonic in the ‘Rarrk’ catalogue, is here given a further edge by the mix of disciplines represented at the seminar – anthropologists, art historians, curators and artists. As it turned out, the professional art historians were Europeans (the Australian Sally Butler was not at the seminar) and the anthropologists were mainly Australian anthropologists who have long histories of engaging with Aboriginal art and have worked closely with the art world. Unlike anthropology, art history still has a small footprint in the field of Aboriginal art, and this is particularly the case with art from Arnhem Land. If anyone was in unfamiliar territory it was the European art historians.

The discussion first really kicks off with the essay by Howard Morphy – the anthropologist who throughout his career has most engaged the art world. The book is worth buying for his essay alone. It succinctly and clearly outlines a benchmark argument that cuts through the debate between art history and anthropology, and European and non-European art. Its thesis is the basis of his recent book Becoming Art: Exploring Cross-Cultural Categories (University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2008).

In contrast to most of the European authors, Morphy, Butler and Paul Taçon (who comprise the Australians), as well as Til Förster, the only anthropologist amongst the Europeans, move in a fairly relaxed and pragmatic way between Aboriginal and European art. The three European art historians, Claus Volkenandt, Kitty Zijlmans, and Anne-Marie Bonnet, find it particularly difficult. Their arguments will seem dated to an Australian audience because they return to debates about otherness that we, perhaps too quickly, put behind us some 15 years ago. However their essays are very valuable because they explain why Indigenous art has not been accepted as contemporary art outside of Australia. They also have a better sense than the authors of the ways in which intensification of globalisation is impacting on this debate. Even Bernhard Lüthi and Jean-Hubert Martin, who have long moved easily between Indigenous and European art,
have difficulty moving beyond the European discourse precisely because of their long experiences as European curators challenging the traditional Eurocentric practices of the European art world.

Ian McLean
University of Western Australia.

Pemulwuy is a highly readable historical novel. It begins as an action-filled page-turner as Kiraban, a young Awabakal man, joins a British ship that has come to assess the harbour and surface coal reserves of what would become the Hunter River, and voyages to Sydney (pp. 13–19). As Pemulwuy and his Bidjigal clan cease trading with the British and begin to wage war against them (pp. 54–56), this intelligent and sensitive young man joins Pemulwuy’s camp and becomes part of his inner circle.

But our insight is not confined to Pemulwuy’s camp. The reader witnesses discussions in the Governor’s drawing room, Bennelong’s hut, the road between Sydney and Parramatta and other places of life and work. Willmot paints a rich picture of the pattern of relationships within and between the British and the Irish, the Eora and Tharawal and other surrounding peoples. Close friendships, desire, marriage, conflict and betrayal form and break bonds between characters forged by many different cultures. Communication across multiple languages is a matter of great fun as well as confusion.

The novel is based on a consideration of the historical sources for British and Eora conflict from the 1790s into the first decade of the nineteenth century. Willmot reads the very scant written references to Pemulwuy and conflict around the colony’s outposts at Parramatta, Lane Cove, Castle Hill and on the Hawkesbury, as the tip of an iceberg, a barely submerged war. The novel does what no history could do, and brings to life the many and various militant and pacifistic personalities and their machinations, negotiations, plays for power and backings-down on both sides. The decision-making processes of the Eora and other Aboriginal peoples are carefully constructed from anthropological understandings mostly drawn from other places, as is etiquette, marriage practice and kinship, and the Eora relationship with country (pp. 422–423). British decision making, as rendered by Willmot, is as full of intrigue, as shaped by conflicting traditions as it is around the Eora campfires, the preserved written account of events and motivations not at all like the reality.

Pemulwuy himself remains shrouded in mystery for much of the novel, keeping his own counsel, aloof and uncompromising, and experienced by the reader through the eyes of others – the respectful and sometimes fearful eyes of his followers and some of his British opponents, and the contemptuous yet always uneasy eyes of the Rum Corps. He is very much a part of Bidjigal society, but also designated as different, by the cast in his eye and the actions of his mother after his birth (p. 48). Pemulwuy’s decisions are unilateral, and he does not have much of a sense of humour. His gothic charisma provokes a mixture of impatience and awe in this reader – much as it does in the other characters – staying just the right side of the ridiculous. As the story progresses, though, the focus of the novel narrows to a more intense examination of the costs of war on both sides (a war
has no winners, only losers in this novel). Pemulwuy becomes more accessible when we finally follow him to one of his father’s Dreaming places (pp. 375–376), and find him alone with Kiraban, laughing with exhausted irony about how much has been lost (p. 403).

Willmot has further embroidered on his main themes in the second edition. Most noticeable for this reader was that Willmot has augmented the role women play in what remains nevertheless a very masculine novel. Nargel, a young Bidjigal woman, marries an escaped Irish convict after he has been through a modified initiation process, and carries out a daring and bloody rescue of her husband after he is captured fighting the British (Chapter 14). In the second edition her courage is emphasised more than her brutality, as her husband finally sees her clearly as a ‘determined Bidjigal woman’ (p. 133). He has introduced two new fictional female characters to the story, one of them a young Irishwoman whose zestful and capable presence as an adopted Eora woman complicates the relationship of captured soldier Lieutenant Marshall (pp. 365–367) to his captors, and helps to re-cast the formerly rather witch-like historical figure of Silky Donovan (another female Eora adoptee) in a more sympathetic light (pp. 174–175).

Willmot has updated his essay explaining the purpose of his novel, and its relationship to history, and is clear about which characters and events are based on historical ones, and which are fictional (pp. 417–427). But he does not engage in introspection about the nature of the known and the unknown in history and the possibilities offered and risks posed by fiction in the telling of such a story, reflections that might have added much to the recent debates between Kate Grenville, Inga Clendinnen and others. Rather, his premise is the same as it was in 1987: that Pemulwuy and his long, astute and at times very effective campaign to expel the British invaders from Eora country were hushed up at the time, and have been neglected and even suppressed by historians ever since (p. 418). This new edition, however, appears in a very different climate (no doubt partly created by Willmot’s novel itself), with recent histories such as Grace Karsken’s The Colony and Rachel Perkins’ and Marcia Langton’s First Australians acknowledging ‘Pemulwuy’s War’ and ‘the Bide-a-gal resistance’. A preface by a second party, helping to place the book in its contemporary context, would have enhanced the book’s relevance and appeal. The novel awaits scholarly attention in its new context.

Unfortunately, the new edition contains many and glaring typographical errors and lacks the section breaks that in the previous edition signalled changes of scene, very helpful for the reader’s orientation in a book featuring so much simultaneous action.

References


Emma Dortins
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Diane Austin-Broos opens with a long verbatim dictionary definition of the noun *invasion* replete with phonetics. Her book takes the longest possible view of the colonisation of Central Australia in order to explain the state we are in, or rather the state in which Western Arrernte find themselves as a consequence of the invasion of their country from the 1860s. For Austin-Broos it is ultimately an unhappy, disenfranchised and violent state, despite the joy, bravery and resilience of individuals who are her subjects and friends and for whom she has the deepest concern.

Were she given to a more flippant and ironic style of writing she may have applied the celebratory marketing terminology of ‘sesqui-centenary’ to fit the time-frame of her study; *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past*. It is just 150 years since the trickle of explorers and pastoralists arrived to take over the rivers and waterholes of the newly named MacDonnells in the 1860s. That flow turned to a flood that inundated that place and its people, dislocating their society. Elsewhere in Australia the faux-birthday of 150 would be some sort of local government celebration at least. The awkward centenary re-enactments of the early 1960s in Alice Springs are unlikely to be mimicked in the next couple of years for the 150th.

Austin-Broos has looked across the century and a half to understand, analyse and explain the effects of that invasion. Its path-finder was John McDouall Stuart followed by waves of cattle and sheep, goats, donkeys, camels, cats and dogs and the unending black hair-string of the telegraph line. She has identified two significant moments that not only remade the economy and demography of the place but also remade the ways of thinking for Arrernte themselves. Her key point is that Arrernte did not just observe things change around them but they were changed in-themselves. She argues there was an ontological shift, a wholly different way of apprehending the world that in important respects was not and could not be voluntary and self-conscious. Simply put, the ontological shift means that even dramatically and profoundly altered circumstances just become accommodated as a given of everyday life.

The first moment was the establishment of the Finke River Mission at Hermannsburg and the effects of sedentary dependency further contained by policing and the alienation from land. The second was the outstation movement resulting from Land Rights and new overwhelming forces of the ‘market society and its bureaucratic state’. The contradictory outcomes, she argues, left people marooned and unemployed on their own lands and caught in an underlying, enduring if not intractable ‘current of violence’.
Austin-Broos has written a dense and subtle book which bravely carries the subtitle *Invasion, Violence, and Imagination in Indigenous Central Australia*. Brave because, like Peter Sutton (who she credits in this context), she is trying to explain the once-and-future risks of a catastrophic social failure exacerbated by endless violence – structural violence – in the community. She is prepared to identify the perpetration and perpetuation of despicable violence and explain its structural form and, what she calls, its *social imaginaries*. In working out the bases she has given a deeply theoretical account that adroitly deploys history as a complex of incidents (facts), recollections (perceptions) and also as structural changes (modes of production, modes of administration, modes of belief). Anthropology is used similarly as a mode of enquiry but with an active sensibility about the heaviest of philosophical assumptions that both inform and destabilise that discipline. Martin Heidegger for example shows up here and there. Marx and Engels have a mention. Durkheim and Levi-Strauss and others appear in the pages to exert or explain the ontological shifts: Bryan Bowman, Pierre Bourdieu, Bob Buck, Thorsten Veblen, Olive Pink, Karl Polanyi, Max Weber, RM Williams, the Braedon brothers, Roland Barthes and the trope of the cowboy. A conga-line of Australia’s best and most influential anthropologists cross the landscape with Spencer and the Strehlows in the lead. Austin-Broos both draws from and adds richly to that strong and globally important scholarly tradition. Most importantly she skilfully brings to the forefront the people who are the subject and concern of this book.

However, she will leave most readers behind. The depth of analysis and the density of some of the writing and language will not be accommodated by many. Much of the book would only be intelligible for those already most closely acquainted with the subjects and the subject matter. Much of the detail will serve as an inside record. A work of this complexity demands a primer – a direct, stripped-down, plain language pamphlet that presents the central propositions without both the disciplinary language and the layers of contextual detail. Those who need to read this book but probably will not are politicians, bureaucrats and officials, mining industry consultants, lawyers, magistrates, medical professionals, police commanders and the missionaries who come and go. Also the makers of public opinion would benefit, the journalists and columnists who write so confidently about Central Australia from Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra. The point here is that it would be a great pity for such an important and valuable contribution to lie on the shelves with a limited prospect of impact, especially in the context of the present intervention. Her informants and friends, from whom she draws so deeply, are of course among the least equipped to read and comprehend her book, which seems ever thus. Such complex scholarship reproduces a knowledge disequilibrium as we *lhentere* (whities) interpret their *relhe* (Western Arrernte) culture and situation in a non-transferable way.

The book does not set out to be a comprehensive explanation of all factors. Some significant silences may be noticed. First, while the book integrates the two cultures of history and anthropology it leaves aside the third culture, political science in the form of governmental power politics and its bureaucratic
handmaiden, policy. The book deals well with Arrernte factional or interpersonal politics yet the shenanigans of successive Northern Territory governments over decades in their attempts to spoil, influence, divide and rule, do not rate a mention: the funding of almost unending law suits over land and the Land Rights Act, the duchessing and special favours to individuals and communities, the overt and covert campaigns against the Central Land Council (CLC), the byzantine mysteries behind the establishment of the cultural powerhouse that is the Strehlow Research Centre, the siphoning of Commonwealth monies, and the manipulation of land tenures, especially around leases, reserves and national parks. It is hard to argue that Western Arrernte were not heavily directly impacted and detrimentally affected by Darwin for the last 30 years.

Two or three other silences include Native Title, Alice Springs and arguably football. Native Title as a legal, political and organisational force is not addressed. In particular the successful Alice Springs application that gave Arrernte the ownership and authority of which they had been deprived since everyone else moved in. Moreover, Alice Springs itself is strangely absent, hardly discussed. It seems set aside on the dubious assertion that the ‘majority of rural Aboriginal people engage with only a few establishments when they go to Alice Springs.’ Ntaria/ Hermannsburg is the locus and focus of the story but the giant gravitational influence of ‘town’ does not really get a guernsey. That metropolis exerts an influence over the entirety of Central Australia. Alice of itself shifts the ontologies and the cultures and tilts the political economy of the whole desert region. The town camps and the family networks, the stores, the Native Title outcomes, the commerce and entertainments, the policing, the car yards, the Commonwealth Bank, Lasseter’s Casino, the Todd River and the Todd Tavern bottleshop, the CLC, the government agencies, the Mall and the movies (for anomic youth especially), the court house, the prison, the Yeperenye Centre, Yipirinya School, the Northside IGA supermarket, Red Rooster, Traegar Park, K-Mart, Congress and the hospital. Yes, the hospital. What of the hospital? Hermannsburg in this sense is a dormitory suburb of Alice Springs.

The Yeperenye Festival of 2001, a spectacular, dramatic and moving reassertion of Arrernte cultural presence, is not mentioned nor the extraordinary stamina and performance that night of its cultural director Rupert Max Stuart who sang for hours and hosted the entire show. He is one of Australia’s two most famous Western Arrernte people yet is misnamed Stewart in just one other context. Max Stuart is perhaps the most senior man of the past decade or more. Curiously Albert Namatjira and his legacy is not addressed. The Hermannsburg watercolourists could scarcely have generated a more striking ontological shift in literally changing the ways of seeing for everyone. And football does not get a guernsey either (except for a photo taken at a football festival – she means carnival). Unbeaten so far this season at the time of writing, the Hermannsburg Bulldogs deserve a mention – if not a premiership – because, as Dick Kimber so credibly argues, football has shifted the codes of authority, charisma and respect to favour the young men. Football may have also changed the rituals of conflict
and the identifications with symbolic worlds and kin. By the final siren, men can grow ‘big’ and ‘small’ amid the filiations and dances of that ceremonial ground. Football is not a trivial anthropological factor.

That said, a review such as this cannot do justice to a book of the depth, intelligence, honesty and concern as *Arrernte Present, Arrernte Past*. In applying history to anthropology in such a complicated situation – so deeply constituted by a particular understanding of the deep past – Austin-Broos is ruefully aware of her own condition professionally, historically and personally. At the close, as if to draw strength, she invokes Inga Clendennin’s remark that anthropology and history together are powerful and says of herself that she is ‘an anthropologist principally concerned with change’. At that moment she surely saw the ghost of Karl Marx singing-up his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach that ‘philosophers only interpreted the world in various ways, the point is to change it’.

James Warden
University of Canberra

The frontier period, in Queensland, extended for 80 years after European invasion. Indigenous people who survived the violence and dispossession became strangers in their own land. But this was not the end of their oppression, because for decades afterwards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout Queensland were punished – if they showed the slightest sign of resistance to colonisation – by forcible removal to the Palm Island settlement near Townsville. In this way the government effectively dealt with two problems: the provision of minimal relief for Indigenous people scattered across the state, and the incessant calls of European settlers for their removal. The upheaval of removal to distant settlements – after the violence of the frontier – means that places like Palm Island are important sites of European colonisation and Indigenous dispossession in Queensland. Joanne Watson’s Palm Island: Through a Long Lens alerts us to these important connections, and therefore makes a great contribution to our understanding of the frontier and post-frontier periods.

Misunderstanding about Palm Island’s function (and reality) continued up to recent years, helped, as she astutely notes, by indifferent or lazy historians and journalists: ‘attention to the island’s history is most often non-existent, superficial or distorted’ (p. 134).¹ As a result, many people failed to realise what was really happening at Townsville’s back door. Correction, in the form of a historical oversight, has been long overdue, and Watson’s book finally and effectively meets that need. This book is a valuable and important addition to our understanding of Indigenous history and experience in Queensland. As Watson perceptively explains, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in settlements such as Palm Island were effectively the prisoners of colonisation:

Much of this history has been about the criminalisation of Aboriginal people for trivial offences, the role of police in the colonisation of Aboriginal lands, the over-policing of Indigenous communities and the use of prisons as a means of social control. (p. 145)

Despite Palm Island’s critical role in the forced removal regime, many non-Indigenous Queenslanders have remained, it seems, unaware of the island’s purpose and history. Palm Island’s operation and purpose – as an island penitentiary and as a threat held over Indigenous people throughout Queensland, remained largely hidden from sight. Authorities and tourist operators tried to paint a benign picture of the island’s operations, but not

¹ ‘Contemporary journalists regularly visit Palm Island, to focus voyeuristically upon alcohol-related violence’ (p. 134). It is not clear if this includes journalist Chloe Hooper, chastised for comparing Superintendent Curry with Sergeant Hurley (pp. 134, 154).
all were convinced. This attempted cover-up continued, as government officials and ministers constantly extolled the benefits of reserves and removals. In 1936, EM Hanlon, Minister for Health and Home Affairs, told Queenslanders: ‘If the aboriginal in Queensland were left entirely on his own resources he would be a miserable individual indeed’. ‘Palm Island’, had been chosen, he said, because of its beauty, the island’s isolation from Europeans and the government’s ‘desire to have a settlement to which recalcitrant and difficult natives could be sent, and from which escape would be difficult’. Events during the past ten years have helped make the community and the media aware of the circumstances that people on Palm Island have known too well for almost one hundred years. A historical background was urgently needed to grasp why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were suffering such appalling problems in what appeared – to outsiders – to be a tropical paradise.

Watson has made an important contribution to this new awareness. Her 1993 doctoral thesis ‘Becoming Bwgcolman: Exile and Survival on Palm Island, 1918 to the Present’ was, until now, the main easily-available source for anybody wanting to understand how Palm Island fitted into the broader Queensland context. Therefore the production of this book, in which her thesis is supplemented by an informed discussion of recent events on the island, is timely. The book is further enhanced by material derived from new scholarship since 1993, and thus makes a great contribution to a better understanding of Queensland’s Indigenous history. We can now, at last, begin to appreciate the systematic neglect and racial segregation that took place right across Queensland and reached a pinnacle on Palm Island.

Banishment to Palm Island was, as numerous historians have noted, both a threat and a punishment for Indigenous people throughout the state. Some went voluntarily, usually to join members of their extended families already removed there. However, as Watson accurately notes, there were a number of much more sinister elements at work. As she argues, government was indifferent to the tensions created on the island:

Palm Island penitentiary was developed in its early days, with the deliberate and articulated desire to allow conflict to foment between the various groups forced into exile there.

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2 See, for example, ‘Island of palms and tropic beauty: Palm Island provides an excellent example of a Government’s paternal care for a dying race’, The Queenslander, 11 March 1937: 28; and a German publication: ‘On Palm Island the Aborigines were thrown together. Some had retreated from the white man, the others were driven by typhoons to Palm Island. They are happier today in their retreat than on the neighbouring continent, changed as it is by foreign culture’, Münchner Illustrierte Presse (No 19, 1937), translated in Queensland State Archives [henceforth QSA], A/69469.


5 Cited, for example, by Hooper 2008: 272–273.


The forced relocation of people who might have been traditional enemies into close proximity with one another was one issue, but a closer examination of selected police, court and prison records uncovers other disturbing facts. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, charged with violence against other Indigenous men or women were removed to Palm Island – despite being found not guilty at court. In other words, the lack of judicial process or incriminating evidence was no impediment to their imprisonment on the island. Some convicted prisoners were taken to Palm Island ‘to complete the remainder of their sentence’. Other men, convicted of violent offences within their own communities and families, were taken by police to the island on their discharge from prison. The deliberate concentration of so many violent offenders was bound to inevitably produce communities that eventually boasted ‘the highest rates of violence in the Western world’.8

This use of Palm Island and other Aboriginal Reserves as ‘dumping grounds’ for former prisoners is a point worth closer examination.9 Archibald Meston, one of the first Aboriginal Protectors, believed that ‘in no case should time expired prisoners be returned to their original haunts’, yet he complained bitterly when Aboriginal ‘troublemakers’ and ‘dangerous criminals’ were sent to his ‘domain’.10 His contemporary, Walter Roth, held similar views: ‘all time-expired aboriginal prisoners shall be effectually prevented from getting back to their native countries’.11 As historians Finnane and McGuire noted, removals were an integral component of colonisation:

Incarceration within unique institutions, segregation from the settler population and surveillance and regulation through an expanding bureaucracy were strategies of social control increasingly deployed in an attempt to address the distinctive challenges posed” This practice continued until the last decades of the twentieth century.

There are other factors to consider. Watson notes Mark Copland’s ground-breaking research on Indigenous removals in Queensland, which revealed another important fact: one third of all removals (which reached a peak between 1915 and 1942) conducted throughout Queensland were to Palm Island.12 Copland showed that Palm Island, Cherbourg and Woorabinda were major destinations for discipline-related removals, with over 40 percent of ex-prisoners sent to Palm Island.13 Apart from the ‘disciplinary’ reasons, other Indigenous people were

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8 Yarrabah, Mapoon and other Aboriginal communities in North Queensland share this appalling statistic. Blake 2001: 50.
9 See Blake 2001.
10 Southern Protector of Aboriginals to Home Secretary, 7 July 1902, QSA, A/58929, letter 10565 of 1902; Southern Protector of Aboriginals to Minister for Lands, 5 October 1903, QSA, A/58930, letter 29553 of 1903.
12 Copland 2005: 147.
taken there for ‘health’ considerations. As Copland notes, Dr Raphael Cilento’s objective of making Palm Island ‘a medical clearing house for Aboriginal people from other settlements and reserves’ was almost achieved during the 1940s.\footnote{Copland 2005: 199; Kidd 1997: 100, 111.}

A few minor criticisms of the book are necessary. More detailed maps of the island and the settlement, particularly showing structural changes over time, would be useful.\footnote{For example, an excellent map of the settlement in 1936, found in the Lands Commissioner’s files, can be compared with the 1930 map presented at the inquest into Robert Curry’s death; QSA, A/27541 and JUS/ N907, inquest 260 of 1930.} Watson’s explanation of the shooting of Superintendent Robert Curry in 1930, although well-researched, does not appear to have incorporated the valuable first-hand account provided in Renarta Prior’s book ‘\textit{Straight From the Yudaman’s Mouth}: the Life Story of Peter Prior’ (1993), although Peter Prior’s subsequent murder trial and discharge in Townsville was (p. 71). This is a curious omission. Similarly, Cheryl Taylor’s excellent recent analysis of literary texts associated with Palm Island gives us good insights into Indigenous and non-Indigenous narratives of island stories.\footnote{Taylor 2009.} It is also unfortunate that some of the recent work on frontier conflict has not been used as well, particularly studies of the Native Police. For example, no archival evidence has been found to date which supports the descriptive term ‘Kalkadoon Wars’ (p. 18). Regrettably, Sergeant Chris Hurley was not the first serving police officer in Queensland charged in relation to an Indigenous death in custody (pp. 1, 20). That dubious distinction belongs to Native Police Lieutenant J Donald Harris, charged with the murder of an Aboriginal prisoner in 1863.\footnote{Richards 2010.} Despite these small criticisms, this is an important book for anybody wishing to better understand Queensland’s and Palm Island’s history. It is highly recommended for readers wanting to discover the truth about the treatment of Indigenous people in Australia, and deserves to, at least, be held by every school and public library in the state. The author has done an excellent job of introducing the broader community to the salient features of Palm Island’s history.

Much of Palm Island’s history can be found in official records, and this book may inspire others with knowledge and experience of Palm Island to produce their own stories. A few extra details from the archives, specifically those concerning the creation of Queensland’s most notorious ‘island penitentiary’, will further enhance our understanding and may encourage further research.

Islands were suggested as prisons for Queensland’s Aborigines long before Palm Island. In 1867 (less than ten years after Queensland became a separate colony), Inspector Marlow of Queensland’s Native Police wrote to the Commissioner of Police, submitting a plan to ‘suppress the slaughter of cattle by the Blacks’:

\begin{quote}
I would suggest they all be collected with their children, placed on some suitable island where they could be educated and taught to become
\end{quote}
useful. A great many of the Blacks could from time to time be captured. I have no hesitation in stating all the Blacks on the coast might eventually be removed.\textsuperscript{18}

Marlow’s suggestion was forwarded to the Colonial Secretary, who replied ‘his proposition is unique but cannot be acted upon’.\textsuperscript{19} John Marlow was perhaps one of the more enlightened members of the Native Police, a special military force created to provide ‘protection’ for European expansion.\textsuperscript{20} Indigenous resistance in Queensland was always quickly and ruthlessly crushed by colonisers. The only alternative to violence, as far as many settlers were concerned, was the complete ‘abandonment of the colony’.

Ten years passed. The ‘island solution’ to Queensland’s ‘Aboriginal Problem’ was resurrected by colonist Alexander Boyd.\textsuperscript{21} In 1877, he recalled ‘one of the Native Police officers’ (probably Marlow) speaking to him about a proposal to ‘ameliorate the blacks’:

The best plan for dealing with the blacks is to select a coast district, with islands some six miles from the mainland. Pick out the island with the best soil and greatest natural advantages, and form a settlement there – establishing a school under the charge of a superintendent, with a staff of civilised natives. Now collect all the young blacks up to the age of fourteen, and teach them, under supervision, how to employ their time.\textsuperscript{22}

Boyd proposed that old troopers from the Native Police be placed in charge of the island. ‘Allow no gins [a derogatory term for Aboriginal women] on the settlement until the youngsters are civilised. Keep them there for three years. By that time they will be pretty well advanced in civilisation’.\textsuperscript{23} He deplored the lack of action, saying:

We have islands innumerable all along our coast which are, many of them, very well suited for the requirements of such a station, and there are scores of old faithful troopers who would fittingly end their career as guard over the juvenile natives.\textsuperscript{24}

At least one of his contemporaries agreed. Brinsley Sheridan, Crown Lands Commissioner at Cardwell, wrote to the Colonial Secretary in September 1877, ‘proposing the reservation of certain Islands off the coast’:

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Inspector Marlow to Chief Inspector Murray, 9 December 1867, QSA, COL/ A100, letter 552 of 1868.
\item[19] Colonial Secretary to Commissioner of Police, 16 January 1868, QSA, COL/Q5, letter 32 of 1868.
\item[21] Island prisons were popular with European administrators for many centuries; see Kirby 1995: viii.
\end{footnotes}
Allow me to suggest that the Palm Islands, the Family Islands, and Dunk Island should be reserved. I recommend the Palm Islands because I know that the inhabitants of the mainland about Palm Creek, Herbert River, and other streams emptying themselves into Halifax Bay, are in constant communication with those residing upon the Islands, if not absolutely belonging to the same tribe.25

However, Sheridan’s plan was not adopted and Palm Island remained undisturbed.

In 1889, the Aborigines Protection Society suggested an Aboriginal Reserve be established on Palm Island, but JG Macdonald, Police Magistrate at Townsville, argued against the proposal.26 A familiar solution to the ‘Aboriginal problem’ was offered by ‘A Well Wisher of the Blacks’ in 1891:

I would propose that the few remaining blacks, who are congregated around the towns, be generally mustered up, and taken away and placed on an island, or piece of ground specially selected by the government for their sole use and abode, at the same time strictly prohibiting all whites from having any intercourse with them, excepting those who would be placed at the expense of the Government to look after and protect them.27

Public agitation for Government to ‘ameliorate’ Queensland’s Indigenous population slowly increased during the last decades of the nineteenth century. A number of Aboriginal Reserves were established (with varying degrees of success) in the north, but a new colony-wide regime finally began in December 1897 after The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, 1897 was passed. From now on, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander would be supervised by a network of ‘Protectors’ (the police) under the control of a Chief Protector. At first the colony was divided in two, with Northern and Southern Protectors of Aboriginals. The Native Police generally stopped shooting Indigenous people, and ‘ordinary’ police began ‘removing’ the survivors of the frontier war from their homelands to designated ‘Aboriginal Reserves’ at Durundur, Deebing Creek (near Ipswich) and Taroom.

In 1900, the Northern Protector, Walter Roth, asked for authority to ‘remove Aboriginal criminals’ to the Fraser Island mission station near Maryborough.28 Within a year, Aboriginal ex-prisoners were being routinely ‘deported’ to Fraser Island after their discharge from prison. Others, accused of various crimes, were sent ‘for their own safety’.29 However, the Fraser Island experiment proved to be a failure, and the inmates were relocated to Yarrabah near Cairns in 1904.

26 Police Magistrate at Townsville to the Colonial Secretary, 30 October 1889, QSA, COL/A595, letter 9668 of 1889.
28 Northern Protector to the Home Secretary, 21 September 1900, QSA, A/58786, letter 14947 of 1900.
29 Police Magistrate at Herberton to the Home Secretary, 13 June 1901, QSA, A/58786, letter 5113 of 1901.
Ten years later, the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement (north of Cardwell) opened with a former Native Police officer as superintendent. Soon after, the surviving members of the Palm Island ‘tribe’ were taken to Hull River for ‘proper attention’.30

When Aboriginal people (especially in the State’s north) were released from prison, authorities needed to find new homes for them. European settlers called for their permanent removal, so return to their original country was often out of the question. What could be done with them once they had served their sentences? The numbers steadily increased, especially in 1916. Some were removed to Barambah, but both Taroom and Barambah – later renamed Cherbourg – (which replaced Durundur) were full. These ‘dangerous’ discharged prisoners needed a permanent solution.

One 1916 submission by Chief Protector Bleakley foreshadows official intentions. Hull River and other church-run settlements were bursting with ‘removed’ Aboriginal people, and as ‘none of them are willing to receive troublesome characters’, a new reserve was needed. More deportations were planned, including those of former prisoners, but the government’s options were restricted:

The promises made to residents of Taroom and Barambah not to introduce discharged criminals and bad characters makes the question of dealing with these cases as they arise a difficult one.31

The ‘most suitable place’, in Bleakley’s opinion, was Great Palm Island near Townsville, mostly gazetted ‘some time ago’ as an Aboriginal Reserve. ‘The island has a fine sheltered harbour and I believe permanent water, grazing and agricultural land’.32 However, funding was not available and Bleakley’s recommendation was ‘held over’.

A second report in 1917 restated the need. A special reserve was needed, Bleakley reiterated, ‘for use as a penitentiary’:

I would again submit for your consideration the question of establishing another settlement for aboriginals on Great Palm Island, which possess all the advantages necessary for the convenient, economical and successful management of such an institution.33

The island would be the best site, he argued, because ‘it provides security from escape’. The file was marked ‘Consider in 1917–18 Estimates’ and ‘No provision

30 Chief Protector of Aboriginals to Home Secretary, 6 May 1916, QSA, HOM/J234, letter 4329 of 1916.
31 Chief Protector of Aboriginals to Home Secretary, 6 May 1916, QSA, HOM/J234, letter 4329 of 1916.
32 Chief Protector of Aboriginals to Home Secretary, 6 May 1916, QSA, HOM/J234, letter 4329 of 1916.
33 Chief Protector of Aboriginals to Home Secretary, 28 May 1917, QSA, HOM/J234, letter 4959 of 1917.
made’. The proposed ‘island penitentiary’ was shelved, but in March 1918, the Hull River settlement was destroyed by a Category Five cyclone. Government officials inspected Palm Island, one reporting ‘Townsville people could make no complaint’ as the preferred site was ‘down wind’ of an existing ‘Health Resort’. Within three months, the complete removal of all survivors from Hull River to Palm Island was accomplished, and the Palm Island gaol had finally come into existence (pp. 34–35).

The frontier period led to Indigenous people in Queensland becoming strangers – and being declared criminals – in their own land. For decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were punished for showing any resistance to colonisation by forcible removal to Palm Island and other settlements. Removal meant places like Palm Island became important sites of colonisation and dispossession. They allowed government to save money on rations for Indigenous people and satisfied European demands for the land to be ‘cleared’. By alerting us to these important connections, Joanne Watson contributes to a better understanding of Queensland history.

In correcting mistakes and misunderstandings about Palm Island, she has helped us to understand how Indigenous people have experienced colonisation in Queensland. The book’s importance is further enhanced by her analysis of the criminalisation of Aboriginal people, the role of police and the use of prisons as a means of social control. In writing about Palm Island’s purpose and history, she has effectively dispelled a cover-up which lasted for decades. The past ten years has seen much greater media interest in Palm Island, but journalists and the public needed to grasp the island’s historical background in order to understand the contemporary situation. Joanne Watson has made an important contribution to a new awareness of Indigenous disadvantage and to a better understanding of Queensland’s Indigenous history. Thanks to her, we can now begin to realise how neglect and segregation worked on Palm Island.

References


34 Health Inspector RG Wright to Chief Protector, 6 May 1918, QSA, A/58915, letter 1719 of 1918.


Prior, Renarta 1993, ‘*Straight From the Yudaman’s Mouth*: the Life Story of Peter Prior*, James Cook University, Townsville.


Taylor, Cheryl 2009, “‘This fiction, it don’t go away’: narrative as an index to Palm Island’s past and present’, *Queensland Review* 16(1): 35–67.

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Anyone who has spent time in an Aboriginal community cannot but notice the great amount of time and energy that Aboriginal people devote to whitefella ‘meeting business’. What is not always apparent, however, is why Aboriginal people are willing to do so. Kimberley Christen’s book provides considerable insight into the significance of such meetings to Warumungu people as part of a broader field of business they conduct in and around the town of Tennant Creek. According to the author, ‘Aboriginal business’, which encompasses a wide range of practices including ceremony, paid work and claims to land and resources, ‘is concerned with continually creating possibilities for the future of one’s kin and the extended networks from which one draws strength and community’ (p. viii). She notes that what sustains much Aboriginal business in the town of Tennant Creek are ‘strategic, meaningful and conditional alliances’ forged among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parties within structures of unequal power relations (pp. viii, 28). These alliances are rarely straightforward, and the negotiations surrounding them often involve misunderstandings, contestation and compromise (p. 43). In examining how alliances are made, Christen seeks to throw into relief the ‘politics of indigeneity’ operating in Australia and to illuminate ‘the intricacies of these relations, the rerouting of power, and the agency culled by those who may seem to be firmly in the grip of hegemonic power’ (p. viii). In doing so she tracks alliances involving Warumungu and a range of non-Aboriginal actors including white settlers, Aboriginal organisations, local councils, mining and railroad companies, the Australian Navy and tourists.

This book is based on the author’s doctoral research and collaborative work undertaken with Warumungu at Tennant Creek since 1995. During this period the author helped construct Mukurtu Archive, a digital archive of Warumungu history and culture, and contributed to the development of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre. In addition to her work with Warumungu, the author also draws on interviews with staff (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) of organisations and businesses associated with the Tennant Creek region as well as media reports and relevant academic and archival sources.

The body of the book has three major sections, entitled ‘Community Control’, ‘Uneasy Alliances’ and ‘Proper Productions’. Each major section comprises two chapters and an introduction. The sections are preceded by a preliminary chapter which outlines the book’s theoretical framework and central concerns. This chapter has a brief but incisive discussion about the self-determination and reconciliation ‘policies, discourses and practices’ which have shaped Indigenous politics over the past 30 years. This is not a seamless account. Rather, by ranging over different scales and debates the author seeks to capture something of the complex and entangled terrain in which Warumungu alliance-making occurs (p. 6). While some readers may disagree with her position, I found the
author’s discussion refreshing in that it is neither negative critique nor its opposite. For example, she notes that while there were inherent problems with self-determination – including that it was ambiguous, was often undermined by governments (particularly in the Northern Territory) and clearly did not overcome Aboriginal disadvantage and suffering – it also resulted in ‘productive versions/visions of Aboriginal communities and political power’ as well as goals yet to be realised (p. 12). Her call to mend former Australian prime minister Howard’s separation of the ‘symbolic’ and ‘practical’ by ‘reorienting practicality around the work of Aboriginal communities, without divisions among social, economic, cultural and political motives and meaning’ (pp. 18–19) underpins the approach taken in the book.

In Section 1 of the book the author focuses on how Warumungu engagement with Aboriginal organisations and the land rights process ‘redefined the political, social, and territorial landscape of relationships in Tennant Creek’ (p. 28). As with other sections, this part of the book is framed by a brief discussion of recent political events – in this case the Howard Government’s ‘intervention’. Against a backdrop of what the author refers to as the latter’s denial ‘of history’s place in current community dynamics’ (p. 35), she asks what community control means in a space characterised as much by interdependent relationships as structural inequalities.

Chapter 2, ‘Country Claims’, discusses significant historical events following white settlement of Warumungu country, culminating in the rise of Aboriginal organisations and land rights. As noted over many years by a range of scholars including Stanner in the mid 1930s, Nash, and Edmunds, the town of Tennant Creek has a troubled history involving settler conflict with the Warumungu traditional owners of the country that led to their dispossession.1 However, as Edmunds observed, the town is also unusual in the way that its Warumungu and non-Aboriginal residents tried to accommodate their differing interests. While Christen presents little new material on the early settler period and there is overlap with Edmunds, there are also differences. Edmunds’ study is concerned with competing forms of representation and discourse in the late 1980s.2 In contrast Christen focuses on Warumungu ‘histories of engagement’ and partnerships in order to illuminate new arrangements with and claims to people and country amid shifting national and local agendas.

Given the broad sweep of history Christen covers, the selection of topics she treats in detail is necessarily partial. What surprises me, however, is her lack of discussion here of the forced removal of children of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent from Phillip Creek Mission. The latter was the subject of Cubillo v Commonwealth, a case brought before the Federal Court of Australia which involved sisters Kathleen Nappanangka and Eileen Nappanangka, close relatives of Lorna Cubillo who also feature heavily in Christen’s account. I should add that I wrote an anthropological report for the Cubillo case and

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1 Nash 1984; Edmunds 1995.
2 Edmunds 1995.
appeared as an expert witness. In my view the subject warranted Christen’s examination for what it could reveal about conditions of historical ‘intracultural’ engagement and issues of concern which continue not only to resonate but explode in the present. Here I am not just referring to the protection of children, which was an official rationale given for the Howard intervention, but also what happens when people are disempowered. The omission is all the more puzzling considering that the coda to *Aboriginal Business* addresses Howard’s refusal to apologise to the Stolen Generation and Prime Minister Rudd’s apology to the nation, in which he describes how Lorna Fejo, an age-mate of Lorna Cubillo, was taken from Phillip Creek. However, my comments are not meant to detract from what I otherwise consider to be an insightful and well researched book.

Chapter 3, ‘Managing Mobs’, provides a timely discussion of the rise and roles of the diverse Aboriginal organisations in Tennant Creek ‘as part of a local articulation of Aboriginal power vested in the creation of new nodes of community formation’ (p. 79). The author interweaves academic commentary concerning their genesis and limitations with her own observations of their significance in the daily lives of Aboriginal people. She points out, for example, that not only do Aboriginal organisations seek to fulfil their own mandates, they also provide community development services and the majority of Aboriginal employment in the town (pp. 85, 101). In the light of this discussion she ponders what changes that the Howard Government introduced might mean, including ‘mainstreaming’ and legislation which enables the government to seize organisational property (pp. 105–15). Although there is now a new government in power, the fact that the intervention continues to be implemented renders her considerations highly pertinent.

Section 2, Uneasy Alliances, discusses the signing and significance of an Indigenous Land Use Agreement involving Warumungu Native Title holders in the face of a history of bitter opposition from the Northern Territory government. Chapters 4, ‘Constrained Collaborations’, and 5, ‘Practical Partnerships’, are particularly absorbing in their nuanced coverage of the negotiations and background surrounding post-land claim partnerships. The examples treated involve Warumungu, the mining industry, the Central Land Council, the Australian Navy and railway companies.

The third section of the book is explicitly concerned with the materiality of culture. Comprising chapters 6 and 7, it discusses ‘how Warumungu people are simultaneously preserving, producing and repackaging traditional practices in conjunction with national tourist markets, the regional economy, and local desires to maintain proper productions’ (p. 200). ‘Properness’, observes Christen, is a ‘type of continuity’ in which actions are aligned with ‘but don’t necessarily reproduce – an ideal version of the past’ (p. 203). Chapter 6, ‘Negotiating Networks’, tracks how Warumungu women negotiate concerns about both the ‘properness’ of the cultural production of a CD of Yawalyu Mungamunga dreaming songs and control over what is circulated. Chapter 7, ‘Culture Work’, examines the coming into being of the Nyinkka Nyunyu Art and Culture Centre.
As Christen describes, the centre is a collaborative project involving Warumungu as authors of their own cultural representations in a space of intercultural exchange.

*Aboriginal Business* is an impressive achievement. Although the subject matter is complex and wide-ranging, the volume is well constructed and engagingly written. In analysing practices of alliance-making in Tennant Creek, Christen has succeeded in moving beyond binary representations of Warumungu as either victims or agents, assimilated or autonomous, and of the self-determination era as success or failure. She presents us with a valuable, though not uncritical, snapshot of a range of outcomes and possibilities that can emerge when Aboriginal people are active participants in negotiations concerning their futures. The book is especially relevant at a time when, as Nicholas Rothwell recently noted, a ‘dreadful disconnect between the administered and the administrators is palpable’ in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. This is a legacy of the Commonwealth intervention and changes in Northern Territory local governance structures which have resulted in some positive changes but at the cost of Aboriginal people feeling deeply marginalised and controlled by a burgeoning bureaucracy. Christen’s book *Aboriginal Business* will be of value to a wide readership, including those interested in Aboriginal politics, applied anthropology, cultural studies, museum studies and Australian history.

**References**


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Yuendumu Everyday is the latest arrival in a line of very significant monographs that focus on the Warlpiri people of the Tanami Desert region of Central Australia. These start with Meggitt’s Desert People (1962) followed by Munn’s Walbiri Iconography (1973), Bell’s Daughters of the Dreaming (1983), Glowczewski’s Du rêve à la loi chez les Aborigènes (1991) and Dussart’s The Politics of Ritual in an Aboriginal Settlement (2000). Each of these has sought to describe and explain significant aspects of both pre-contact and contemporary post-contact Warlpiri sociality and world view from the perspectives of Social Anthropology, a discipline which aims to document, model and explain the patterns of constants and variables of universal human social behaviour. Of course what was ‘contemporary’ for Meggitt and Munn who carried out their fieldwork in the 1950s, is, superficially at least, past history for Musharbash who carried out the fieldwork on which this book is based between 1994 and 2001. As well as providing a detailed and in depth record of Warlpiri culture, these ethnographies reflect changes in the discipline itself over the past half century: structural functionalism (Meggitt and Dussart), French structuralism (Munn and Glowczewski), feminism (Bell) and post-structural modernism (Musharbash).

As we would expect of the first of these Warlpiri ethnologies, Meggitt’s Desert People takes a very wide view of its subjects as it explores their social behaviour and institutions, including ceremonial practices, spiritual beliefs, values system, economic basis, interactions with Europeans and European institutions, and so on – drawn from his observations of both individual and group behaviour and the explanations and commentary given by his subjects. Munn’s Walbiri Iconography (1973), although it approaches Warlpiri ethnography from a different, and seemingly narrower, viewpoint to that of Meggitt, in explicitly aiming to account for the inventory, meaning, use and role of symbols in Warlpiri artistic expression, also presents an inclusive analysis of Warlpiri society and culture. Although published eight years after Bell’s monograph, Glowczewski’s Du rêve à la loi chez les Aborigènes (1991) drawn from research carried out principally at Lajamanu between 1979 and 1985 follows in the tradition of Meggitt and Munn in situating the Warlpiri within both a general Australian and a universal framework and encompassing both the profane and the religious and the relationships between them. Naturally enough, following the publication of both Meggitt’s and Munn’s monographs, most anthropological studies focusing on the Warlpiri build on – or react to – their findings and tend to address more

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1 Although not strictly an anthropological monograph, Young (1981) should be added to this list as it documents the living conditions of Warlpiri people living at Yuendumu and Willowra in the late 1970s. Musharbash’s focus on the ‘everyday’ and some aspects of her data collection methods have much in common with Young’s work in human geography, despite the differences in analytical methodology and theoretical framework.
specific aspects of Warlpiri culture. Both Bell and Dussart, for example, focus on interactions between the secular and ceremonial life of women at Warrabri (later renamed as Ali Curung or Alekarenge) and Yuendumu respectively.\(^2\)

*Yuendumu Everyday* also has an apparently narrow focus – zooming in on the life of one ‘camp’ and its sleeping arrangements in particular. The lens does open from time to time to capture a wider vista of everyday life at Yuendumu. However unlike the earlier ethnologies, *Yuendumu Everyday* confines itself to the profane or secular.\(^3\)

Musharbash moves in with her subjects of study, which she introduces to the reader in Chapter 1, as an ‘adopted daughter’ of one of the senior members of a shared *ngurra* or living/sleeping area in Yuendumu whence she can closely observe the behaviour of her co-residents.\(^4\) This *ngurra* is of a type known in Warlpiri as *jilimi* or *yarlukuru* whose principal residents are women sleeping without men: widows, married women temporarily or permanently separated from their husbands and unmarried girls. Dependent children and grandchildren of these women also sleep in the *jilimi* area with their mothers, aunts, elder siblings or grandparents, thus spanning four generations. A *jilimi* contrasts with two other Warlpiri sleeping arrangements: a *jangkayi* or *yampirri* which is exclusively for males, and a *yupukarra* where husband and wife (or wives) sleep together within a living space with their young children (pp. 32–33).\(^5\) Of these, it is the *jilimi* area which tends to be the main locus for socialising involving young and old, male and female during the day (Chapter 7) as its periphery offers the least socially restrictive space of all *ngurra* types.\(^6\) Musharbash gives a detailed account of life within her *jilimi* (which can be usefully compared with Bell’s writing on *jilimi*).

As part of her research methodology, Musharbash recorded the names and relationships (and other pertinent details) of all the people who slept in her *jilimi* during the 221 nights she was present (p. 62): where they slept, who they slept next to, noting changes in sleeping patterns and their motivations. Over this period 105 individuals slept in this *jilimi*, but the average nightly number was 17, typically consisting of adult women and children (Chapter 4). As detailed in Chapter 3, this *jilimi* was situated around a four bedroom European style

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\(^2\) Bell 1983; Dussart 2000. Bell’s subjects include Kaytej, Alyawerr and Warlmanpa as well as Warlpiri reflecting the rather more mixed population of Warrabri.

\(^3\) A characteristic that *Yuendumu Everyday* displays in common with that of Bell (1983) and to a lesser degree with Dussart (2000) is its overtly autobiographical content, with the author either at the centre of the narrative or at least always overtly present within it. Although Glowczewski’s earlier (1989) monograph is more in this autobiographical genre, it is aimed at a rather different much broader public than her 1991 work which sought to make a serious contribution to anthropological knowledge.

\(^4\) Musharbash uses pseudonyms but anyone familiar with these families can easily identify the people referred to.

\(^5\) Significantly the elderly husband of one of Musharbash’s ‘mothers’ from whom she had ‘separated’ many years before, but continued to care for, lived close to the *jilimi* which also included his mother-in-law, in a *jangkayi* situation.

\(^6\) On Warlpiri avoidance practices see Glowczewski 1991: Chapter 8; Laughren 2001; Meggitt 1962, 1972; Munn 1996.
house with two bathrooms, a storeroom and a verandah off the row of bedrooms stretching between the laundry and kitchen. This house is set in a yard fenced in on three sides with an adjacent house marking the northern boundary toward which the bedrooms faced. Significantly the preferred sleeping area is not the ‘bedroom’ areas but the outside – bodies sleeping side-by-side in a row on the verandah in wet or windy weather and further out in the yard in front of the verandah at other times. One is struck by the continuity with the sleeping arrangement captured in Munn’s wonderful photo taken in 1957 at Yuendumu of a Warlpiri family’s *yujuku* ‘humpy’ with the *ngurra* ‘sleeping area’ in front of it consisting of hollows in the ground sheltered by a low windbreak (*yunta*) made of tree branches (Plate 1, p. 9 in 1986 edition of *Walbiri Iconography*). The house in Musharbash’s *jilimi* takes the place of the *yujuku* in the camp photographed by Munn – both are shelters into which the group can retreat and find shelter or privacy and they also both serve as storerooms for some goods.

Musharbash gives a brief history of housing for Indigenous *yapa* residents of Yuendumu (Chapter 2), a good part of which this reviewer directly witnessed. Although officially established in 1946, only one Warlpiri family lived in a contemporary European-style house when I arrived in Yuendumu in September 1975.7 Others lived in proximity to a one-room ‘stage one housing’ unit (dubbed ‘Donkey houses’ or ‘Igloo’ houses) set on a concrete slab, with a curved iron roof extending beyond three of the walls to the edge of the concrete slab to form a small verandah. Others lived near the dysfunctional aluminium Kingstrand houses also set on a concrete slab. However, most of these had been abandoned. None of these ‘stage one housing’ units had any plumbing installations; there were no taps, no toilet, no ablution or laundry facilities – in fact no facility for either accessing or storing water.8 These buildings were freezing in winter and roasting in summer. Most people were living in camps of their own construction made out of all sorts of discarded building materials combined with bush timbers and branches.9 Two rather small communal toilet-shower blocks served a population of around 1000. There were some very large *jilimi* occupied by closely related widows, many of whom were sisters who had been cowives along with younger yet unmarried women and some grandchildren. During the cold windy winters they would all sleep in a row (their dogs closeby), one beside the other, with some small fires breaking up the long line of bodies in these long thin structures known as *warntamarri* – barely wider than the length of the tallest woman – made out of the same available materials. In reading *Yuendumu*

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7 All European residents, limited to working adults and their families, were lodged in some type of conventional building of European manufacture, supplied by their employer.
8 Although a tank had been installed outside each of the ‘Donkey’ houses to collect rainwater from the small roof, by 1975 almost none of these any longer held water. Before the long drought broke in 1974 the annual rainfall was so meager and/or irregular that these tanks may have seldom served their objective for any useful length of time. In fact Yuendumu was only equipped with a reliable supply of good water (from bores) in the late 1970s when Ian Viner was Minister for Aboriginal Affairs (further improved in the 1980s) and it was several years after that before this water was laid on throughout the areas of Yuendumu where most Warlpiri people had their camps.
9 See Meggitt 1962: 77.
Everyday it is important to keep in mind that access to European style houses for the majority of Warlpiri living at Yuendumu only became a reality during the 1980s and 1990s.10

Musharbash frames her study in terms of Heidegger’s model of process generated by the interrelated and interdependent actions of ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’;11 in order to dwell one needs to build; how one builds reflects how one thinks, how one thinks influences how one dwells (Chapter 1). Musharbash’s stated aim is to explore whether ‘the interconnectivity between the physical structures in which people dwell, their social practices and their world views, can be metaphorically encapsulated in symbols for different physical structures of domestic space’ (p. 4). Can these symbols, which in the Warlpiri case differ from the Germanic or European ones that Heidegger and later Bachelard12 had in mind, ‘express the “integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams” of the people who live in them’ she asks in Chapter 2. While Musharbash uses Heidegger’s framework quite skilfully to analyse and present her findings, the metaphorical role of these symbols of various conceptions of ngurra is never really worked through – nor is it central to my reading of this work, at least not in the way that the Warlpiri repertoire of icons is to Munn’s work. This said, Musharbash’s characterisation of ‘camps’ as ‘physical manifestations of people’s movements through their country [which] embody the core values of mobility, immediacy and intimacy’ (my emphasis) (p. 36) captures quite elegantly some of the connotations associated with Warlpiri ngurra. Each of these three values identified by Musharbash in relation to her jilimi is explored in a separate chapter (Chapters 4–6) and more generally in relation to daily life in Chapter 7.

Musharbash further unpacks the layers of meaning expressed by Warlpiri ngurra in Chapter 2 ranging from its narrowest meaning as ‘place occupied by sleeping body’ (which would include a bedroom in a European style house if it is primarily used for sleeping in) associated with an icon symbolising a row of parallel outstretched bodies contained within a single windbreak, to a broader notion of ‘sleeping area’ where an identified group of people sleep, have slept or could potentially sleep, to a ‘living area’ (symbolised by an icon formed by concentric circles) which encompasses the whole area in which a group (family, clan, tribe) believe that they have the right to sleep (as well as live), that is, their country or place as opposed to someone else’s, sanctioned by their kinship association with others including their Dreaming ancestors.13 Thus

10 Meggitt’s description of Warlpiri living conditions was almost directly applicable to those still pertaining at Yuendumu in the 1970s (Meggitt 1962: Chapter VI). However, by 1975 all the Yuendumu Warlpiri (and some Pintupi families) dwelt within the township area. As observed by Meggitt, in the 1950s and 1960s family camps were dispersed over a much larger area of the Yuendumu reserve, with many families spending considerable periods of time travelling (on donkey and on foot) in the country beyond Yuendumu reserve.) For a detailed history of housing for Aboriginal people at Yuendumu, see also Keys 2000.
11 Heidegger 1993[1951].
12 Bachelard 1994[1958].
13 For an in depth discussion of the notion of ‘other’ in the Warlpiri context, see Glowczewski 1989: Chapter 9.
ngurra is also used to designate the family group as in ngurra-jinta ‘one camp’ (p. 34) or patrimoiety distinguished by the north-south opposition. It extends to the ‘habitat’ of any creature. Furthermore ngurra is used to refer to days as units of time – somewhat akin to ‘three more sleeps till Christmas’ – which is quite distinct from parra referring to ‘daytime’ as opposed to ‘nighttime’ (p. 35). Despite the relative sedentarisation of the Warlpiri since the Second World War, terms like ngurra, jilimi, jangkayi and yupukarra, are still underlyingly relational terms expressing ways of being in relation to place but more importantly ways of being in relation to other people defined by kinship ties, shared experiences, gender and personal preference.

Musharbash proposes that ngurra ‘encapsulates the parallel metaphoric load to the house in the Western context’ (p. 5). This assertion I find difficult to reconcile with the meanings of ngurra set out in Chapter 2. House denotes a type of fixed physical structure which must be associated with a physical place with which people may or may not interact beyond the actual act of construction, whereas ngurra primarily denotes a relationship between people and place mediated through (shared) actions such as camping or sleeping (traditionally a group’s location may have changed almost every night at certain times of the year) and/or via kinship links to the actions of their Dreaming ancestors. As Musharbash points out, this nightly construction of one’s ngurra or sleeping area followed by its daily deconstruction is still practiced within the confines of the fixed location of Musharbash’s Yuendumu jilimi. It is telling, I think, that the Warlpiri borrowed from the Arrernte the word yuwarli as distinct from ngurra to designate European style buildings and the places where they stand, that is, stations, towns, settlements. Also telling is the fact that the meaning of terms for different types of shelter of Warlpiri manufacture, such as yujuku or yunta, which are physical objects fixed at a location, has not been extended to denote European buildings or the settlements that contain them. Yuwarli marks both European created settlements and their buildings and houses as non-Warlpiri (or even non-Aboriginal).

Unlike the Warlpiri people studied by Meggitt, who carried out his research between 1953 and 1960 at the then recently established settlements of Yuendumu (1946), Lajamanu (1951) and Warrabri (1956)\(^\text{14}\) or by Munn who researched at Yuendumu in 1956–57, the residents of Musharbash’s jilimi had spent virtually all, or, in the case of the senior women, a major part of their lives at Yuendumu. These senior women were born before its establishment and socialised in the main by parents and elders who had experienced ‘first contact’. Those born before 1946 had no or negligible experience of formal European education, have a poor command of English and are unable to read or write. Apart from the children born on these settlements, Meggitt’s ‘Desert People’ were all relatively new to

\(^{14}\) In each of these settlements the Warlpiri either made up the majority of inhabitants or, in the case of Warrabri, a substantial proportion. Interestingly none of these was set up on unambiguously Warlpiri land. Attempts by Baptist and Lutheran missionaries and others to persuade the government to create a settlement for Warlpiri on their own country failed as European interests in the land for mining and pastoral exploitation prevailed. See Peterson et al 1978.
life on settlements run by the commonwealth government as part of its post-war welfare and assimilation program. While the adults’ experience with Europeans was mixed – some had worked and lived in Aboriginal camps attached to cattle stations or mining ventures, or had worked with the Australian Army during the Second World War – most had been brought up in a still very traditional way of life on Warlpiri and Anmatyerr lands. In the 1950s, despite receiving some government rations, Warlpiri living on government settlements or on pastoral stations were still very dependent on their land and their own food-gathering skills to provide them with adequate food and shelter. Taking Meggitt’s work as her base line, Musharbash makes some interesting observations about changes in living and sleeping patterns that have evolved along with the sedentarisation of the Warlpiris and all that it entails (for example, the way in which government pensions and welfare payments are paid) as she does with other aspects of Warlpiri socialisation, including marriage. Marriages, Musharbash concludes, have become far less stable and of much shorter duration, the age differential between men and women in a first marriage has diminished, and the ways in which marriages are initiated in have also changed. Sedentarisation and the financial independence flowing from the payment of various government pensions, argues Musharbash, favours the establishment of long term relatively stable jilimi (Chapter 3).

Yuendumu Everyday packs a lot of information into just over 200 pages written in a clear straightforward style supported by useful glossary, index, maps, and other graphics. Despite the daily tally of diverse observations from the jilimi that inform this book, there are data gaps that I for one would have liked to have had filled. Where are the dogs? One of the first indications that one is approaching a jilimi (or jangkayi) camp has traditionally been the extra large contingent of dogs that cohabit with the human residents, each one having its own ‘child’ (or owner in European terms). Did anyone take responsibility for cleaning the living or sleeping areas? Who? How? How was access to the limited facilities such as the toilets, bathrooms and laundry managed? How does the ‘negotiation’ or positioning of people with respect to these resources compare with the detailed description Musharbash gives of the production and distribution of food, especially damper, and of firewood (Chapter 7). How are the disruptive incursions of drunken male relatives handled? How typical is this jilimi of Warlpiri daily life? How does life in camps which are not so directly influenced by this senior generation compare? What are the sleeping arrangements of younger people, whether in jangkayi, jilimi or yupukarra? Do young married couples prefer to sleep inside bedrooms where they have some privacy or do they too continue to sleep ‘outside’?

Despite these gaps in the description, for any outsider working in a Warlpiri community, or in fact in any similar Aboriginal community in central and northern Australia, this book should be essential reading. It will act as a guide to help the outsider navigate their way through this foreign territory and to make sense of some of what they may encounter. In particular it offers much food for thought to those involved in providing services, particularly housing, to the
residents of places such as Yuendumu, and invites a radical rethink of both policy and practice. A crucial insight illustrated by the ‘tale of Tasmin’s dream home’ which Musharbash uses to open and close her book is nature of the relationship between the prestige value of the much desired European style house and the desire to maintain the Warlpiri identity derived from the notions of shelter and family evoked by ngurra. One is led to ask, if each adult in Yuendumu were given a newly constructed European style house, what would be the outcome? How many would be occupied by family groups interacting with the house in the way that middle class whites do? If the residents of Musharbash’s jilimi opt to not occupy their ‘bedroom’, but rather crave the reassuring ‘immediacy’ and ‘intimacy’ of their close family members as both sleeping and waking companions what do we predict? What sort of accommodation would best suit our prediction? This exercise can be extended to other aspects of life such as work, education, health.

It is undoubtedly true that the physical, social and economic isolation which characterised most of the first 40–50 years of Yuendumu’s existence (restricted access to outsiders, transport, money, paid employment, modern communications (no telephone, radio or television), coupled with a language barrier and limited schooling) is breaking down, so that mainstream influences now play a much greater role and may bring about accelerated changes in the future, especially as contact with the ‘old people’ who lived the traditional life and who maintain its values and ways of thinking pass on.\(^{15}\) Musharbash does not address the likely influences on the pattern of daily life she documents of the contemporary pattern of age distribution within Aboriginal Australia, so marked in ‘remote’ communities such as Yuendumu, where those under 30 far outnumber those over 50 (which is the mirror image of age distribution in non-Aboriginal Australia). On the other hand, the persistence of ways of being over time, as illustrated by how Warlpiri people interact with their living space and their co-residents within and others without, despite what may appear to be radical changes in both their physical habitat and socio-economic and political reality, cannot be just wished away or decreed against as so often seems assumed by government.

The publication of this book is very timely, coming out shortly after the federal government ‘Intervention’ aimed at improving the life of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory struck in Yuendumu and elsewhere in the Northern Territory, and as the Northern Territory government reorganised local councils into their mega shires – including those at Lajamanu, Willowra and Yuendumu which were incorporated into a single mega shire. Had the politicians responsible for these policies and the public servants charged with implementing them been informed by *Yuendumu Everyday* and its predecessor Warlpiri ethnologies, would they have perhaps hesitated, reflected and engaged in serious planning and negotiation with the residents of settlements such as Yuendumu and sought advice from anthropologists and others who have gained a deep knowledge

\(^{15}\) At least three of the core senior members of Musharbash’s jilimi are now deceased.
of the people and their way of life before implementing their policies? Surely good intelligence and careful planning are as relevant to the success of civilian campaigns as they are to military ones.

References


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In Junga Yimi, the magazine produced by the Bilingual Resources Development Unit of Yuendumu School, exuberant pieces used to appear from time to time by ‘Yakajirri’, Andrew Stojanovski, about the work of the Mount Theo petrol-sniffing prevention program, and the movement Jaru Pirrjirdi (strong words) which developed out of it. Now Stojanovski has written a book which will, as the medical anthropologist Maggie Brady writes in her foreword to the book, ‘make an excellent primer for new frontline workers and for young anthropologists entering the field’.

Dog Ear Cafe is at once memoir, history, report and advocacy piece. It traces Stojanovski’s life at Yuendumu from his start as a youth worker trying to deal with petrol sniffing, to the development of the Mount Theo program after the desperate decision taken by Peggy Brown Nampijinpa, her husband Johnny Hooker Creek Japangardi and Peter Toyne, then principal of the school, to take the petrol sniffers away to an outstation for rehabilitation in isolation. The core of the book are 12 chapters in which the course of the Mt Theo Program is tracked through numerous vignettes of life at Yuendumu, interspersed with letters written at the time, photographs, meditations about the nature of petrol-sniffing, of reciprocity in Aboriginal society and in the relationships with yapa (Aboriginal) and kardiya (non-Aboriginal) which were necessary to make Mt Theo work. Running through the book is the tension between his desire to live with his family and his desire to be at Yuendumu and Mt Theo.

The book is a vividly written account of the development of intercultural understanding. It starts with misunderstandings, Stojanovski’s shock on encountering the violence of petrol-sniffers, and a young Warlpiri boy’s shock when criticised for upsetting Stojanovski: ‘Kardiya [white people] don’t have feelings’. This alleged lack of feeling contrasts with the suggestion that compassion is a defining Warlpiri characteristic (as exemplified by the ubiquity of the ‘poor thing’ wiyarrpa word in modern songs). At the same time he recognises that of course not all Warlpiri show it.

Throughout the book are reflections on the intercultural teamwork needed to create Mount Theo outstation as a place to allow petrol sniffers to regain their lives. This includes recognition of ‘humbug’ (demand sharing) as mutual obligation, as ‘teamwork’, but at the same time, recognition of how hard it often is for Warlpiri people to reconcile the obligations of family life with the impartiality demanded of workers in most Australian organisations. He comes to believe that whitefellas are seen as neutral like Switzerland, and so have a special role to play. This is well illustrated by his account of how to reconcile everyone’s need and desire for vehicles with the need for an emergency vehicle at the outstation.
Reflections on the actions and beliefs of petrol sniffers are also a key part of the book, and I was struck by his discussion of the success of his younger colleague Karissa Preuss in having serious conversations with petrol sniffers as among peers (‘D&Ms’ deep and meaningful conversations). In fact the book is filled with the generous recognition of the skills of his associates. No wonder the team worked well.

The story is infused with the breathtaking exuberant desire to Get Things Done, save petrol sniffers from themselves. This led the government to award OAMs to Stojanovski and his colleagues Japangardi and Peggy Nampijinpa Brown. It also led to all sorts of actions that would horrify ethics committees and government agencies. He knows this, but justifies it from the fairly unarguable position that the alternatives would have been more harmful.

Reports and facts appear in more conventional form in an appendix on how the Mt Theo program works, an afterword by the then operations manager of Mt Theo, Brett Japaljarri Badger, outlining the Mt Theo program since the early 2000s and the Jaru Pirrjirdi movement, and concluding with helpful lists of names and places and a Warlpiri glossary. Future historians and biographers of the Warlpiri will regret the decision to change some personal names and details, but the sacrifice was necessary in order to describe events that people may feel sensitive about, but which are important for understanding how people lived in and around ‘sniffing central’.

As a portrait of life among the Warlpiri, it can be compared with Yasmine Musharbash’s contemporaneous *Yuendumu Everyday: Contemporary Life in Remote Aboriginal Australia* (Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2008), which is reviewed by Mary Laughren in this volume. She talks about Yuendumu from the point of view of an anthropologist living in the single women’s camp; Stojanovski does it as a community worker helping exceptional people – Peggy Nampinjinpa Brown, her husband and Johnny Hooker Creek Japangardi. As a memoir, in its astonishing honesty about Stojanovski’s feelings and actions (the good, the silly and the dangerous), *Dog Ear Cafe* recalls the frankness of Neil Murray’s autobiography, *Sing for Me, Countryman* (Sceptre, Rydalmere, New South Wales, 1993).

The book leaves me with a great deal of admiration for what Nampijinpa, Japangardi, Stojanovski and their associates achieved, with a lot of sympathy for the women and the government officials in Stojanovski’s life, and above all with gratitude to him for telling the story his way. It will make a brilliant film.


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With the current critical crisis facing the Murray-Darling Basin, Lower Lakes and Coorong region, any book is welcome that offers some form of dialogue, and contributes to solving the River Murray catastrophe. Aboriginal Studies Press is to be congratulated for publishing Jessica Weir’s timely book *Murray River Country: an Ecological Dialogue with the Traditional Owners*, and for the stylish cover and numerous colour plates they include. They have also reproduced many of the same plates in black and white on the relevant pages, plus a number of useful maps, including a map (p. 8) of the system’s many locks and weirs. One wonders if Weir sees the irony of her surname?

The book arises from Weir’s PhD research, and like any graduate thesis, it contains a considerable amount of theory. It is not light reading and is obviously not aimed at a lay audience, but hopefully this will not drive away those interested in reading up on the current state of play regarding the Murray-Darling water crisis. Even though the subtitle infers the book is a ‘dialogue with traditional owners’, the book seems at times more a dialogue between Weir and current ecological theoreticians than with the Indigenous Elders. This is disappointing for those expecting to hear multiple voices from the Elders associated with the Murray-Darling system. This is not a criticism – it is just the inevitable nature of the beast that often emerges from PhD theses. Weir’s book has value for those who thrive on immersing themselves in social and ecological theory.

Personally, I would have liked to hear more from the Elders themselves, particularly the Indigenous members of the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MLDRIN). The MLDRIN is an Indigenous alliance that was formed to promote the voices of Indigenous people of the Basin regarding water management (p. xi), and it was this group who embraced Weir at their meetings, and allowed her to conduct interviews with their members. They obviously collaborated with Weir in her research, with the aim of getting their concerns and genuine frustrations over the water crisis heard by a wider audience. It would have been productive for Weir to have conducted further interviews with more very senior Elders who still have vivid memories of their life before the construction of the barrages, particularly in the Lower Lakes and Coorong region,1 and with those who grew up along the river prior to the construction of the many weirs, locks and irrigation channels which have altered the flow of the mighty Murray forever. More voices of the Elders, and less theory, would have assisted the book in reaching a wider and less academic audience.

1 For those interested in hearing such voices, I highly recommend the viewing of the excellent DVD *Nukkan, Kungun, Yunnan: See, Listen, Speak: Ngarrindjeri’s being heard*. The Hero Project, Camp Coorong, South Australia, 2009.
Although the current water crisis is changing by the day, with the 2010 Queensland floods now feeding into the Darling, and with the recent release of further government commissioned reports and plans, Weir’s research has huge value. She outlines the complex mix of state and Commonwealth bodies involved in water management, and the difficulties of government representative bodies dialoguing with non-government lobby groups, including the MLDRIN. She also addresses the inevitable clash of cultural perspectives on how a river should be viewed – as a resource to be exploited for economic gain or as an organic system to be nurtured and respected. Weir is insightful in her observations of the inevitable contradictions that pervade the water debate. Traditional owners, for example, were surprised that water catchment authorities, regional managers and other bodies use the term ‘natural resource management’ in a different way to themselves. For the MLDRIN it simply means ‘caring for country’ (see p. 72), while for others it means exerting control over a particular resource (pp. 71–72). Weir includes some very astute quotes from the Indigenous members of the MLDRIN about their frustration at meetings with government bodies: ‘We had a chair at the table, but we had to keep our voices outside’ (Yorta Yorta Elder Henry Atkinson, p. 68). Weir also provides helpful explanations about the complex system of locks and weirs along the Murray, as well as outlining the chronological passage of political manoeuvres by the various bodies established to manage (and exploit) the waters of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Weir outlines the inadequacy of ‘The ‘Living Murray’ program established in 2002, by the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council, which resolved to return 500 gigalitres to the river for ‘environmental flows’, despite expert advice that 4000 gigalitres was required (pp. 38–40). This plan came to nought, however, as 2002 emerged as ‘the worst drought since written records were kept’ (p. 40). The consequences of mis-management outlined in Weir’s book justify her use of the term ‘ecocide’, which describes the ‘status quo of deplete, destroy, depart’ (p. 140) by the so-called ‘moderns’ (pp. xii, 4). Weir holds the moderns responsible for the current depleted state of the important Murray-Darling Basin. In Weir’s own words:

The expansion of modern water management in Australia was, and continues to be an exercise of the moderns of their powerful knowledges [but this] has been their downfall … In such a short time the life of the inland river country has been destroyed. In ruining this life support, the moderns negate their own dream … Their power to intervene, direct, control and allocate nature is not producing the prosperity they expected. (p. 118)

Weir concludes, through her dialogue with Elders, that ‘We must look to our relationships with rivers to understand how to get ourselves out of this catastrophe’ (p. 145). Just as Weir closes her important book with the words of the Yorta Yorta Elder, Monica Morgan, so will I:

Who else is going to give them (the moderns) the knowledge about protecting country, but those traditional owners who have understood
and lived with their country and passed it from generation to generation? Then they’re all going to lose, and we’re going to lose along with those people. (p. 148)

Unfortunately, Weir’s book confirms this sad truth that we are all losers because we have chosen to ignore the advice of the Elders regarding the need to ‘care for country’.

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In March 2010, Doudou Diène, former United Nations special rapporteur on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and racial intolerance, gave a presentation entitled ‘Slavery, Human Rights, Justice and Reparations’. In this he denounced historical silence and urged historians to re-write tragic and violent histories to include those who had been forgotten or ignored. He was referring to slavery but his presentation in some sense echoed the way historical narratives evolved in Australia in relation to Indigenous peoples. At the beginning of the 20th century, there seemed to be no room for Indigenous Australians in the history of the country.1 But over the past 40 years, historians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have contributed through works of different forms such as biographies, essays and oral histories, towards putting an end to what anthropologist William Stanner once called the Great Australian Silence.2

In Histories of Kanatha, Seen and Told, George Sioui, a member of the Wendat nation (more commonly known as the Huron, a name given by the French and considered pejorative) and turtle clan, the first Amerindian to obtain a PhD in history in Canada (1987–1991), takes us to a different part of the world, to other histories. The 372-page volume is his third major publication preceded by For an Amerindian Autohistory: an Essay on the Foundations of a Social Ethic3 (1992) and Huron-Wendat: the Heritage of the Circle4 (1999) and it is presented as the ‘first collection written by an Aboriginal Canadian on the Aboriginal understanding of history and the colonial experience’. The book is divided into five main sections – Living History, Pardonnez ma présence, Indien sans Terre mais avec Plume, America my Home, and Bridges, and it is composed of 36 sub-sections with the special feature of being written half in French, half in English. It includes documents as varied as letters, articles and speeches from all over the world and it highlights 17 years of reflection and activism. The reader can find for instance an intriguing letter to the Prime Minister of India where Sioui makes a singular request: the gift of the official name ‘Indian’ to his nation; a conference paper given in Germany; a keynote address at a special symposium on comparative studies between Amerindians and China’s Northern Ethnic Groups at the Inner Mongolia University in China; a text prepared for the Cree Working Group on Cree Governance. We learn about Aataentsic (the First Woman): his text contains a creation myth, as well as legends and poems. We also learn about his struggle for religious and territorial rights and the legal victory of his nation at the Supreme

1 See for instance Reynolds 1989: xiii.
3 Published in French as Pour une autohistoire amérindienne. Essai sur les fondements d’une morale sociale by Laval University Press (1989, 1999) and in Mandarin by Inner Mongolia University Press (2000).
Court of Canada in 1990. Sioui puts forward his idea of ‘americizing’ the White man, and he refers to the French ideological construction of the ‘Noble Redman’. He describes history as a ‘road roller’ controlled by economic and political elites and presents his own conception of an Amerindian Autohistory. The text is sometimes repetitive but we are warned from the beginning not to be surprised nor worried about this. The reader should not try to find any linearity, as the book should not be approached in a western way. In fact, the notion of the Circle that Sioui describes as the foundation of Indigenous or Amerindian cultures, contributes to the originality of the book. As political scientist Dalie Giroux mentions in her introduction, we are taken on a ‘circular journey’, a journey in the history of Canada – pronounced Kanatha in Sioui’s native language.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) stated about Sioui’s book For an Amerindian History that:

> Nothing is more important for the future of our studies than to know that our Amerindian colleagues are ready and determined to take on their own anthropology and their own history. Sioui’s work is a brilliant demonstration of this undertaking.\(^5\)

Through his work Histories of Kanatha Sioui shares with us his own vision and his people’s perspective on the place of Aboriginal people in Canada. His initiative certainly provides an enriching way of reviewing history.

**References**


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\(^5\) As quoted in Sioui 1992: backcover.
Fantastic Dreaming: the Archaeology of an Aboriginal Mission by Jane Lydon, 320 pp, AltaMira Press, Maryland USA, 2009, ISBN 9780759111042 (cloth), $49.95.

The Moravian-run Ebenezer Aboriginal Mission at Antwerp near Lake Hindmarsh in the Wimmera region of Victoria, which ran from 1859 until its closure in 1904, has been the focus of intensive historical and archaeological research in the past decade. Recent studies include Jensz (2001, 2008) and Kenny (2007). Earlier historical and archaeological studies include Massola (1969, 1970, 1975); Werner (1970); Christie (1979); Pepper (1980); Longmire (1985); Clark (1990); Harris (1994); Rhodes (1997); Fels (1998); and Edwards (1999). The title of the work is taken from a reminiscence of the missionary FW Spieseke who commented that the missionaries’ vision that Aboriginal people would flock to hear the Christian gospel at Ebenezer may appear to be ‘fantastic dreaming’ (p. ix).

The book began as an archaeological project, aiming to explore the material and spatial dimension of the cultural encounter between Aboriginal people and German missionaries. Archaeological investigations were conducted with descendants of the Wergaia language speakers who lived and lie buried at the Ebenezer site. Lydon explains that she is centrally concerned with cultural exchange and the potential of historical archaeology to reveal marginal, and especially Indigenous, experience, and to show how certain aspects of the mission regime – its spatial politics and material culture – still influence policy making about Australia’s Indigenous peoples. Ebenezer as a ‘contact zone’ becomes a case study of cross-cultural exchange. Specifically, the study:

explores the role of spatial politics and material culture in the process of missionization and traces the continuing salience of judgements about Aboriginal people's housing and domesticity to relations between black and white in Australia. Focussing upon the archaeological investigation of Ebenezer Mission in southeastern Australia, the traditional country of the Wotjobaluk group of Wergaia language speakers, I examine how spatial organization, the consumption of Western goods, and especially the practices and bodily performances required by domesticity were deployed on missions and reserves as important methods of transforming Aboriginal people. (p. 2f)

In Chapter 2, Lydon outlines traditional Wergaia life at the time of the arrival of the invaders, focusing on broad patterns of social organisation, connections to land, and material culture. The next chapter explores the distinctive nature of the invasion of the Port Phillip district from 1835 until the establishment of the Moravian Mission of Ebenezer in 1859. Chapter 4 explores the disjunction between Moravian missionary attempts to create an idealised didactic landscape and the actual complexity of Aboriginal-European cultural exchange. The next chapter examines the ways that the Protestant evangelical worldview was fundamentally gendered and the enhanced patriarchal structure of the Australian
mission that acted to infantilise the Indigenous people. Chapter 6 explores the spatial aftermath of the closure of the mission in 1904, and especially the system of segregation between Aboriginal residents and white townsfolk and landholders that continued. The next chapter considers the history of Aboriginal affairs in Victoria in the 1930s and 1940s and the public discourse of Aboriginal camp reform and assimilatory public housing. The final chapter documents how former missions and reserves continue to occupy an important place in Aboriginal memory, as sites of recent events, ancestral resting places, historical landmarks, and the focus of social action in the present. In 2005, the Wotjobaluk achieved the first successful native title agreement in south-eastern Australia, and as Lydon explains, this milestone marks a new phase in their history, as the community uses its past to construct a new vision of its future.

Fantastic Dreaming is well-written and provides a comprehensive and rich spatial history of the Ebenezer mission. It presents many historical photographs and reproduces important sketch maps (such as Robinson’s 1845 sketch of the Wimmera River on p. 85). Lydon successfully interrogates the marginal status of the Wergaia in regional Victorian towns, such as Antwerp and Dimboola, in the twentieth century and reveals how disparaging comments from non-Aboriginal people, especially in the 1950s, toward the physical fabric of Aboriginal houses were blind to the long term, if intangible, attachment of Aboriginal people to their places (p. 205). This attachment to the mission site is explored in great detail in the final chapter that presents a history of Ebenezer as a site of heritage management. Mission sites are complex places – from one point of view they may be seen as places of incarceration where Aboriginal peoples’ lives were controlled and they were subject to infantilisation, and for others they are places with a distinctly Aboriginal past and they support efforts to preserve and interpret the physical remains of mission sites. With the publication of Lydon’s book, the Ebenezer mission station has become one of the most researched former Aboriginal mission sites in Victoria.

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This book is written as a teaching volume aimed at undergraduate students. To judge its success we have collaborated on this review, giving both the perspective of a student (KR) and a teacher (RP).

As a university level volume, the book initially appears an easy read. It is short, has many illustrations, uses case studies to make points, and even has the some material presented in cartoon form. Lovata cleverly uses this easy style of presentation to make some rather insightful comments on our discipline, holding up examples of the inauthentic to bring into question ideas about how we perceive the authentic. At the end of each chapter there is a set of exercise questions for students which can serve as useful departure points for further investigation or discussion into ideas, concepts or problems touched on in the case studies.

Lovata leads us into the discussion about what is authentic archaeology using a nice pithy cartoon to describe the Piltdown hoax. This technique avoids the usual hackneyed description of the hoax and the players, while making the point that at one extreme there are clear fraudulent hoaxes designed to deceive. Such frauds, Lovata argues, are interesting in the sense that they provide a useful reference point for what many think is truth in archaeology. It makes us feel better about our authentic versions of the truth if we can point to clear examples of fraud. He hints, however, that things are more complex than this by using examples from some site surveys where truth, or the authentic, is legislated for by the State which defines what constitutes an archaeological site.

Using this as a starting point he then goes into considerable detail in two case studies: the fake Anasazi cliff dwellings at Manitou Springs and the use of torréons, or stone watchtowers, in south-west United States. These two examples are used to bring into question in a subtle way what is actually authentic, and whether truth is as real as we might like it to be. The fake Anasazi dwellings are seen by most of the public as being real and how they are presented is probably as good a rendition of the truth as you would get at a real archaeological site. The torréons, although widely used in advertising and as part of a fast food restaurant, are imbued with significant meaning for Hispanic groups in south-west United States. For them the torréons are archaeological artefacts that connect them to place and form a crucial part of their identities. This appears to be the crux of Lovata’s thesis – is it the stories or the artefacts that are important? If it is the stories, then what makes the stories made up by heritage professionals better or worse than those made up by others. Lovata is being quite provocative in holding this mirror up to the discipline.

In the final part of the book, Lovata looks at artists and enthusiasts who use archaeology as part of their research, to comment on how the past is viewed,
or simply for fun. Fridgehenge and other comical renditions of Stonehenge are examined and the artists interviewed. Although this part of the book is quite entertaining, it does reinforce the central theme of the book: questioning the stories that we create around artefacts (be they authentic or inauthentic). Bringing art into this conversation is an intriguing device in another sense. The analogy between art and archaeology and how both disciplines define what is authentic is telling. In art, for instance, there is considerable debate about whether street graffiti is valid, probably because the form breaks the strictures of the conservative core of the discipline. Similarly, in archaeology we are faced with questioning whether, for example, Aboriginal interpretations of archaeological sites are valid. Archaeologists may pay lip service to this, but in the end we continue to allow the State to make management decisions about sites based almost exclusively on the conservative values, or authentic stories, of archaeologists.

Although Lovata’s examples are mostly from the United States, students should be able to look with fresh eyes at examples from their own countries. In Australia, for example, we have numerous examples of the inauthentic (Old Sydney Town, boomerangs sold at airports) versus the authentic (Port Arthur) for students to consider.

RP: As a teacher, overall I really liked this book. Lovata does not spoon feed the student. Questions are asked, issues are raised, but the scholar is in the end left to consider. This can cause a bit of unease in students who look to teachers for the authentic version of the truth.

KR: As an undergraduate student, I found Lovata’s book an accessible and enjoyable read. I liked how even case studies familiar to me (such as Stonehenge and Piltdown man) were expanded on and presented in fresh ways, whilst new ones (Manitou Springs and torreóns) were introduced and treated in sufficient detail for me to understand their significance to the argument. I was particularly intrigued by the chapters on archaeology’s relationship with art and recreation, and Lovata’s gentle suggestion that sometimes archaeology takes itself too seriously. Although first year students will be able to follow Lovata’s argument, this volume would probably be most beneficial to later year and honours students who are already familiar with the workings of academic archaeology and are interested in investigating how the discipline functions, defines and validates itself.

Kate Rogers and Rob Paton

At the 1993 Oral History Association of Australia national conference held in Sydney at the State Library of New South Wales entitled, aptly for this review, ‘From private ear to public eye’, Paula Hamilton presented a moving paper on roadside memorials as an invitation to the general public to remember and to mourn. At that same conference, the keynote address was given by leading historian Professor Deryck Schreuder, who made the statement that oral history was, in this post-modern age, at parity with all other sources for historical research, all of them being subject to scrutiny and questioning. Oral history and memory had arrived!

In the fine introduction to this volume, the two editors refer to the fact that oral history had for a long time been ‘buried’ – in that sense an unacknowledged participant in public history. Nevertheless, in the 1970s in Australia, oral history had contributed to a considerable number of published histories. These included histories of the Great Depression, publications on labour and migration history, all largely dependent on oral testimony.

The editors herald in the introduction that the essays in the collection:

   demonstrate an understanding of oral history as something more than an archival activity. Oral history, as explicated here, is at heart a deeply social practice connecting past and present and at times connecting narrative to action’.

The chapters in essay form lend the readers the ability to travel the world and to gain a perspective on selected oral history and public history endeavours in other countries. I should like to highlight the essay ‘Mapping memories: oral history for Aboriginal cultural heritage in New South Wales, Australia’ by Maria Nugent, which finds its place in Part I, ‘Creating Heritage’.

Some criticisms of oral history have been that those interviewed did not leave their own ‘backyard’. Did life stories remain only at home? Maria Nugent in collaboration with archaeologist Denis Byrne set out to extend that individual backyard into a ‘backyard zone’. Their interviewees, who lived near Taree, New South Wales, many of them residents of the Purfleet Aboriginal reserve, remembered continuing to visit places where they had traditionally held beach parties or fished and hunted. They explained how in order to do this, as twentieth-century white settlement expanded, they had to negotiate areas where they were not welcome, indeed often positively excluded, so that their pathways to the beach or the fishing grounds were circuitous, but successful. Their testimonies contribute to a ‘geo-biography’ – the biography of a landscape with their pathways carefully mapped by means of overlays on aerial photographs.
The ‘backyard zone’ also included the local cinema, which Aboriginal people were allowed to attend, despite measures that dictated that they were almost invisible. They sat in the roped-off front rows only and entered the building by a separate door. Without the evidence collected in this project, a large part of how an Aboriginal community continued to conduct its lifestyle against the restrictions of white settlement would have been lost.

Part II, ‘Recreating Identity and Community’ is led by South African historian Sean Field who examines two areas of Cape Town, now changed and dependent on re-imagination. Langa was established in 1927 as an official settlement in Cape Town for black Africans. Overcrowding for many reasons ensued. In 1952 the national government under its apartheid ideology introduced the hated ‘pass laws’ requiring black Africans to carry identity documents which were frequently checked and much persecution ensued. In remembering Langa, residents recounted with pride and rage how they had protested the injustices of these laws in the 1960s and 1970s.

Established in the 1830s, District Six nearer to the centre of Cape Town had been home to disparate communities including whites, coloureds (mixed race) and black Africans. After 1948 this ‘cultural diversity’ was anathema to the new national government’s apartheid ideology. District Six was zoned a ‘white area’ in 1966 and thousands of residents were forcibly removed from their dwellings, dispersed to other areas and the vast majority of their former homes destroyed. The area to this day is largely deserted – ‘rubble and weeds are all that remain’.

Now in post-apartheid times museums have been established in both areas, that of District Six being the more popular destination. The memories of former residents movingly inform the museum’s displays to the public. Sean Field concludes:

Both Langa and District Six are historically significant, but how they are remembered, imagined and represented is contested with the non-racial transformation – or lack thereof – of the post apartheid city.

Langa is imagined as the ‘proud elderly African’ township of Cape Town. But as it has become a congested mixture of houses, flats, hostels, barracks, and shanties in informal settlements, it has also come to be viewed a poverty-stricken ghetto with different generations and migrant groups competing for scarce resources. In contrast District Six’s multicultural past has led a range of people across the racialized working – and middle class areas of Cape Town to make valid claims to its past. For many – especially for coloured former residents – it has an iconic status.

The Langa Museum, still in an embryonic stage, also draws on oral testimony. Brief stories on pillars guide the public along a heritage trail through the community. Field comments:
A persistent challenge for both museums is to transmit the lived memories of apartheid to the second, third, and coming generations. Recording the oral histories of living witnesses, before they become frail or die, is therefore urgent.

These testimonies will allow the people of the future:

to understand the past they did not themselves experience and to ensure that communities are regenerated ... Oral historians can play a constructive role in overcoming the social divisions of apartheid by recording and disseminating a range of people’s stories through books, radio, film, exhibitions, memorials and the internet, across communities and generations ... to contribute to imagining the city and its communities as a place for all.

Part III addresses issues involving change and advocacy for change, a further powerful use of oral history and public memory. The topics here concern Albanian migration to southern Europe; homelessness in Cleveland, Ohio; how women remember post-war Kosovo; and the lives of Colombian displaced persons.

*Oral History and Public Memories* is a carefully chosen collection of a worldwide investigation including – in addition to Australia and South Africa – America, Canada, Turkey, Kosovo, Colombia, Greece, New Zealand and Singapore. There are frequent quotations from interviewees. The introductions to each part are clearly and comprehensively penned. There is a useful index and extensive notes and citations accompany the essays.

The collaboration between Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes, two illustrious historians in touch across the continental divide between Australia and the United States, has resulted in a volume that is not only instructive and interesting, but inspires reflection and promotes the understanding of the synthesis and the mutual dependence of oral history and public memory.

Rosemary Block
President, Oral History Association of Australia (NSW)
I confess to having difficulty with brackets in text, especially when they enclose only part of a word. Porter uses this device for our current (post)colonial times, to signal that the colonial is not a past era since we have not progressed beyond it, at least in planning. The planning that Porter analyses is land use planning, the profession that Porter chose and has found a need to ‘unlearn’. In particular Porter explores the application of rational planning traditions in the management of ‘public’ lands in forests and national parks. She explains and critiques planning as a colonial spatial culture, a set of activities, philosophies, technologies and regulatory methods that produced both the culture of colonies and contemporary mainstream Australian cultures and that continues to produce injustice for indigenous peoples.

Porter’s PhD research was the genesis of the book. Her primary research is case studies in Victoria, in Nyah Forest and Gariwerd/Grampians National Park. To frame this, Porter engages lucidly with the well-trodden ground of colonial history in British settler states and also with theoretical foundations important to cultural geography. She picks up the thesis, from Michel Foucault and Iris Young, that modernist rationalities have normalised white, male, bourgeois, heterosexual biases, values and utilities of place and rendered other ways invisible or readily able to be dismissed as aberrant. Her case study material is richest in its discussion of how ‘cultural heritage management’ is used to construct a planning domain where Aboriginal concerns, aspirations and expertise are appropriate and valued, but which is distinguished from ‘everything else’, where they are not.

Planning, Porter argues, cannot be transformative of power relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in a settler state such as Australia because planning is itself a fundamental and culturally untransformed practice of colonialism. Collaborative and deliberative approaches to planning, which aim to include diverse stakeholder viewpoints in dialogue and negotiation, do not, Porter argues, give sufficient critical attention to the dispossession and racism that is the ongoing impact of colonialism for indigenous people. Hence indigenous peoples need a special place in planning – they cannot be regarded as stakeholders along with other interest groups.

I welcome Porter’s attention to understanding the cultural position of land use planning and its genesis. Dominant cultures get too little reflection and critique in their own members’ efforts to understand Aboriginal people’s past experiences and possible futures. And, for those involved professionally in land use planning or other kinds of decisions about management of ‘crown’ or ‘public’ spaces, it is important to foreground the nexus between such decisions and indigenous dispossession. Nevertheless I have some difficulties with the book.
The first concern I have is that, even while writing about the ‘unlearning’ of privilege, Porter privileges planning as something that is done by land use planning professionals. She gives no attention to the notion that everyone can plan, that Aboriginal people can be planners as much as anyone else, that planning is a tool-kit that Aboriginal peoples can use to get more control over their futures, and that in such ways planning can be transformative. She gives very little attention in her analysis to research and action partnerships for planning notwithstanding long standing examples such as, from Australia, Davies and Young (1996), Walsh and Mitchell (2002) which won the Planning Institute of Australia 2005 National Award for Planning Excellence, and more recent innovations including country based planning (Smyth 2008) and cultural planning frameworks (Hill et al 2009; Hill 2010). In contrast to such engagements, the stance that Porter models for planners is one of gazing apologetically at the frontier while veiled in Melbourne angst.

Secondly, I find Porter’s proposals for a way forward out of (post) colonial planning hugely unsatisfying. In the book’s final two pages she proposes love as the key, a love that encompasses a connection with and ethic towards others, a love of selflessness, humility and compassion. Pondering what to make of this, I found that Frank Zappa’s critique of the hippy 60s, Oh no, I don’t believe it, kept running through my head: ‘You say love is all we need. You say with your love you can change all of the fools, all of the hate. I think you’re probably out to lunch.’

Is Porter out to lunch? To be fair, Porter does say that her focus in these concluding pages of the book is on the ethical attitude needed for transformative politics, rather than on models of planning practice. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the book would have more traction in the land use planning profession from which Porter’s interest in Aboriginal social justice arose if it had moved beyond critique of mainstream practice to also encompass and promote learning from innovative alternative modes of planning by and with Aboriginal people.

**References**


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Taking Assimilation to Heart demonstrates the efficacy of the new, wide-lensed thinking being applied to studies of colonialism and imperialism. With its comparative settler-colonising framing, this book helps illuminate gendered histories operating on both the intimate and national level, and with ripples both local and global.

Ellinghaus’ study concentrates upon marriages between white women and indigenous men. It starts out with a detailed survey of approaches to such intermarriages, drawing upon cases from two key educational institutions in the United States, the Hampton Institute and the Carlisle Indian School. Student surveys and a rich archive reveal the high rates of marriages among students with non-Indian people. Marrying a white woman was seen as a clear proof of assimilation – at least by the school hierarchy. Unfortunately, those who married ‘uneducated native women’ were considered to have failed – somehow not taking full advantage of their ‘educational opportunities’. Indian male graduates were expected to become professionals and to attract partners from white middle class families. In turn, these partnerships were expected to enhance their future success – at least as measured by Anglo-American eyes.

This book is a very significant contribution to trans-national historiography. Firstly, it demonstrates the value of a comparative approach to understanding what happened in Australia and the United States during approximately the same period. Secondly, it demonstrates the degree to which race thinking pivoted around marriage thinking. In so doing, it proves the crucial role that intimacy played, or threatened to play, in shaping colonising relations. It also demonstrates the significance of educational opportunities, of class and community reactions, in shaping intermarried people’s futures.

As Ellinghaus treats marriage as a historical theme, as a subject worthy of study, there is no need to argue the importance of gender as a category of analysis. A study of marriage, by definition, must pay careful attention to gender. Focusing on marriage makes gender analysis obligatory. Policy and law cannot stand alone. Marriage is a cultural ritual, a social event with public and private consequences. This study must pay careful attention to the relations between individual people across cultures – in this case across indigenous and colonising cultures.

Ellinghaus’ carefully nuanced research and thoughtful analysis calibrates the different tone of ideology, policy and practice in a range of situations in Australia and the United States.
Ellinghaus graciously acknowledges her intellectual influences in the text. This is seen as ‘academic’ style by trade publishers. While Ellinghaus prioritises analysis over storytelling at times, the people’s individual experiences are not lost. She is careful to give them voice by telling their stories, albeit often briefly, and by quoting their voices directly. She also makes indigenous voices, including those of the husbands, prominent – at least wherever the archives allow.

In her attempt to provide a comprehensive overview, readers might become slightly overwhelmed by the mass of quotations and detail. Readers might also disagree with some of the conclusions. For my own part, I tend to steer away from reading ‘high policy’ and focus instead on the ethnohistory of ‘what was happening’ in local interactions ‘on the ground’. Ellinghaus steers a course between policy and people, and sometimes policy and wider ideologies win out. Balance across the many causal and operational factors of history is always difficult and overall, it is clear that Ellinghaus is a scholar who strives hard to achieve fairness and balance and to remain sensitive to the reactions of diverse readers, including indigenous readers.

It is very valuable to have this fresh overview that extends the scope of her study from Victoria out to the other colonies. In reading through the complexities of policy thinking and operation, however, it is chaos rather than order that often applies. Admirably, Ellinghaus tries to find order, and the comparative insights are valuable for understanding colonialism better, in both the United States and Australia. She has a good mind for complexity, and pummels a great mound of evidence and disparate perspectives into as coherent a picture as the evidence will allow. She might be taken to task on some generalisations, but this is a healthy development that would not have been able to happen without her courageous efforts to scratch a surface previously neglected by many mainstream scholars. She is assisted, in both Australia and the United States, with recent rich research into indigenous history, gender and race. She is especially interested in the motivations and experiences of white women, but the indigenous men who married them are also given plenty of words wherever the archives are available.

The marriages were not always happy. We follow some love stories, and then feel the pain, for example, when a partner died. In some cases, Ellinghaus is able to probe into the stories more deeply, as in the case of Eastman, we find resentment and disappointment at her marriage. While Ellinghaus provides plenty of evidence that in late 19th and early 20th century United States, some white women saw marriage to an Indian man as part of an assimilation process. In case of Eastman, it worked well for her man’s career and his wife, although once separated, Eastman was loud in her regrets, as it was not a happy marriage. It is a case where perhaps the gender dynamics of patriarchal marriage systems perhaps saw the ‘white woman’ to getting the ‘raw deal’ in a relationship. We also learn, however, that some intermarried men suffered problems that most likely stemmed from competing cultural pressures.

The time-specificity of the ‘assimilation’ marriage project; could there have been another time when intermarriages were not about assimilation or absorption,
but something else? While Ellinghaus is eager to inform us that both the white woman and the indigenous man in the United States had commitment to the assimilation project, the framing could lead the reader to think it is the woman leading the man, via policies that encouraged such assimilation, rather than the indigenous man engaging with the woman. Ellinghaus’ careful probing of every angle by which biological and cultural assimilation had been variously understood provides a useful antidote to any such expectation.

Ellinghaus tries to make logical sense of assimilation in all its confusing nuances. She provides evidence of performances that equally involve showcasing Indianness as well as whiteness, with more problematising of such examples. Oral and family histories are little used and it would be interesting to know why the author shied away from these methodologies.

Stylistically, Ellinghaus pays careful attention to argument, even providing summaries as she goes along. Although this may not appeal to some readers, it helps make complex arguments easier to follow, especially for students. While Ellinghaus tenaciously struggles to create meaning out of her extensive evidence, this wide, grand synthetic approach only allows an occasional and often too-brief opportunity to provide a close sense of individual marriage and life stories.

While Ellinghaus pays particular attention to Victorian history and Victorian-based scholars, the book’s final chapter provides an overview of Australia-wide policies relating to intermarriage. The contrasts between Australia and North America are profound, and clearly educational opportunities and class were key differences.

One of the book’s most important arguments is that biological absorption had a greater hold as the form of assimilation in Australia, compared with education-driven cultural assimilation in the United States. Plenty of convincing examples back this, but there is also much variety across time, contact zone, colony/state and between coloniser and indigenous protagonists. So, this contention will most certainly be unpicked by future, more narrowly focused studies.

Overall, however, this is an excellent book. It exemplifies the virtues of thorough, rigorous historical scholarship for explaining the present as well as the past. Analytically, it is exceptionally well-informed. Whenever the reader might think that an angle has been neglected, Ellinghaus has been waiting patiently to tackle it, and she does so with humanity and integrity.

This book has deep policy relevance to indigenous people in Australia and the United States and will assist each group in understanding more about their present day circumstances. Notably, it reveals the empowerment and prime opportunities provided by western-style education. It should be read by policy makers interested in understanding indigenous disadvantage in both Australia and the United States.

It is a book carefully informed by primary sources and the growing theoretical literature in gender and colonialism studies. Through assiduous research, it
demonstrates the value of comparative projects between Australia and the United States. Above all, it leaves the reader with no doubt that histories of colonising gender relations can help explain the heart of colonialism.

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From 1939 to 1953, one man, William Penhall, the Protector of Aborigines and the Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Board (APB), had nearly complete control over the lives and destinies of the 5000 or more Aboriginal people scattered across South Australia. In *The Last Protector*, Cameron Raynes, an Adelaide historian and writer, documents Penhall’s role in the ‘illegal removal’ of Aboriginal children from their families during the 1940s and early 1950s. In other states, legislation allowed for Aboriginal children to be removed from their parents, but in South Australia, Raynes argues, Aboriginal children could only be taken away by the APB with the approval of the Children’s Welfare and Public Relief Department (CWPRD). After several unsuccessful attempts to get the CWPRD to cooperate in the removal of Aboriginal children, Penhall decided to ignore the legal process. Instead he used a combination of deceit, bluff and intimidation, as well as coercive powers such as withholding child endowment payments or denying rations to uncooperative parents, to remove children from their families, usually on the grounds that the children were ‘neglected’ or their parents ‘unsuitable’. In the early 1940s Penhall may not have been aware that his actions were illegal, but by 1949 Penhall had received advice from the Crown Solicitor that the APB did not have the authority to remove children from their parents. Nevertheless, he continued the practice up to the time of his retirement in 1953.

Raynes admits, however, that Penhall did not actually remove many children from their parents:

> Under Penhall, the department specialised not so much in *taking* Aboriginal children, as in *withholding* the already institutionalised ones from their parents [emphasis in the original].

What Penhall did, in most cases, was to prevent children temporarily placed in missions or admitted to hospitals from subsequently returning to their homes. Eventually these children would be adopted out to a white family, or committed to Colebrook Home or some other institution, usually without the knowledge or consent of the parents. In other cases documented in *The Last Protector*, Aboriginal parents succumbed to threats from Penhall or the APB’s Welfare Officer, Sister McKenzie, that if they did not voluntarily admit their child to a mission or other institution, that child would be forcibly taken by the CWPRD, an action that the CWPRD was clearly very reluctant to undertake except in extreme circumstances. Once the child was handed over, Penhall did all he could to keep the child in that institution. As Raynes documents, Penhall colluded with certain missionaries, who were keen to gain control of child endowment payments, to place Aboriginal children in their institutions. Penhall often lied to the children’s parents, he also lied to concerned members of the public and...
others who questioned his actions, and he even lied to his Minister when, in 1946, he declared that he could not recall ‘a single instance’ of an Aboriginal child being placed in an institution ‘without the consent of the parents’. To put the lie to that claim, Raynes reproduces some of the heart-rending letters that were written to Penhall by grieving parents pleading to get their children back, or at least be able to see them on weekends or holidays. Such appeals, however, were almost always rebuffed. Some parents kept trying for years; others were soon bullied or bluffed by Penhall into submission.

It is clear that the illegal separation of Aboriginal children from their families did not cease with Penhall’s retirement in 1953. In the recent Trevorrow case in the Supreme Court of South Australia, the State of South Australia was found liable for injury suffered by Bruce Trevorrow resulting from his removal from his family as a child in 1958. Bruce, then aged just over 12 months, was admitted to hospital in Adelaide for a medical problem. The APB considered the child to be neglected and arranged for Bruce’s adoption by a white family. After his adoption, Departmental staff advised Bruce’s parents that the boy was still in hospital, and it was some time before the Trevorrows learned that their child had been adopted by another family. Bruce was not reunited with his family until he was aged about ten, by which time his father had died. The Supreme Court found in 2007 that the State was liable to Mr Trevorrow for ‘misfeasance in public office, false imprisonment and breaches of duty of care’ and awarded him the sum of $525,000. That decision is currently being appealed by the State of South Australia.

Julian Burnside QC, who contributed the book’s foreword, describes Penhall as ‘a dedicated but deeply flawed public servant, a man who put personal beliefs above humanity, and policy above law’. The Last Protector portrays Penhall as a harsh and often capricious bureaucrat, driven by a wholly negative and unsympathetic attitude towards Aboriginal people. Penhall was, according to Raynes, a shadowy and reclusive figure who shunned public appearances and who cloaked his department’s activities in ‘carefully cultivated secrecy’. He rigidly controlled staff appointments and the flow of information within his department and, as the Secretary of the Board, he received all reports and correspondence and prepared all the submissions to the Board. The members of the Board rarely, it seems, challenged any of his recommendations. The Aborigines Act 1934–39, the legislation that Penhall himself had helped to draft, gave the APB virtually unfettered power over all Aboriginal people in South Australia and, to all intents and purposes, Penhall was the APB.

Raynes, unfortunately, provides little information about Penhall’s background or previous career, his religious affiliations or his other motivations, and he offers no real insights into the man himself, other than that he was an officious public servant who did not particularly like Aboriginal people. Raynes tells us, for example, that Penhall was a devout Methodist and a lay-preacher but does not explore how his particular religious beliefs may have influenced his attitudes.

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1 Trevorrow v State of South Australia, 2007, South Australian Supreme Court (1 August 2007).
to Aboriginal people. Nor does Raynes provide much background on any of the other main players. He mentions briefly two of the members of the Board – JB ‘Prof’ Cleland, the chairman of the APB during the 1940s and 1950s, and Charles Duguid, the medical doctor who had played a crucial role in the establishment of Ernabella mission in the far north-west – but none of the other Board members are referred to by name in The Last Protector. The other Board members included representatives from churches and the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association, and, from 1940 to 1946, the well-known feminist and activist, Constance Cooke. Raynes notes that there was considerable conflict between Penhall and Cleland, but does not elaborate. Cleland (later Sir John) was a botanist, anthropologist and Professor of Pathology at the University of Adelaide, and a pillar of the Adelaide establishment. His diaries are in the State Library of South Australia (SLSA) and both the South Australian Museum and the University of Adelaide have extensive collections of his notes and correspondence. None of this material has been consulted by Raynes for additional insight into the nature of the conflict between the two men. Raynes tells us that Duguid resigned from the Board in 1947 due to his frustration over its conduct and lack of success in effecting change and, in particular, the Board’s support for long-range weapons testing at Woomera. Duguid too left a large collection of diaries, notes and correspondence, some in the SLSA and some in the National Library of Australia. Raynes has not examined this material either. It would be interesting to know to what extent the other Board members, particularly Duguid and Constance Cooke, were a party to the removal of children from their parents.

Little has been published previously about the administration of Aboriginal affairs in South Australia during the 20th century and this book is therefore a welcome contribution. It also adds a South Australian dimension to the growing body of research across Australia into the administrative mechanisms and processes which facilitated the separation of Aboriginal children from their families. The Last Protector is a slim volume, however, and very much focused upon Penhall himself and his reign from 1939 to 1953, and I found this narrow focus frustrating. Raynes’ study would have been enriched, I believe, by reference to other archival sources such as the diaries and correspondence of Cleland and Duguid and the records of the Aborigines’ Friends’ Association. Some oral history too could have been included; many elderly Aboriginal people today have strong memories of Penhall, Sister McKenzie and other departmental staff. I am surprised that in this age of scanners and desk-top publishing there is no map in the book, and only one illustration, the relevance of which is not readily apparent. Raynes claims that there is only one public photograph of Penhall (strangely, not included in the book) and in that image his face is partially obscured. However, at least one photograph of Penhall does exist; it was published in an Adelaide newspaper at the time of his appointment in April 1939.²

I am also uneasy about the book’s title. Penhall was not the last Protector. Clarrie Bartlett, who succeeded Penhall as Secretary of the APB, was made a

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² Adelaide News, 28 April 1939: 5.
Protector upon his appointment as Secretary in 1953. Walter MacDougall and Bob Macaulay, the two Native Patrol Officers appointed by the Commonwealth government during the Woomera rocket trials and the Emu/Maralinga nuclear tests, were appointed as Protectors when they commenced work at Woomera – MacDougall in 1949 and Macaulay in 1956. Colin Millar, the APB’s Superintendent of Reserves, was also appointed a Protector in 1956. Those four men continued to act as Protectors until the position was abolished with the proclamation of the *Aboriginal Affairs Act, 1962*. The fact that the position of Protector was not abolished until 1962 was noted by Raynes himself in his earlier publication, ‘*A Little Flour and a Few Blankets*: an Administrative History of Aboriginal Affairs in South Australia 1834–2000’, published by State Records of South Australia in 2002. And, in relation to the subtitle of *The Last Protector*, as Raynes himself admits, the children were usually ‘withheld’ rather than removed.

Raynes has attracted some media attention in South Australia and interstate with his claim that since 2004 he has been denied access by the South Australian Attorney-General’s Department to the Aborigines Department files that he required to complete his research for *The Last Protector*. The Attorney-General had advised him that legal opinions of the Crown Solicitor contained in some files (for example, the Crown Solicitor’s 1949 opinion about the APB’s authority to remove children from their parents) attracted legal professional privilege. Those written opinions should not have been added to Aborigines Department files and should not have been publicly released. Procedures were put in place by the Attorney-General for an officer from the Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation Division (AARD) to examine every file requested by a researcher and remove any privileged material prior to that file being made available. Raynes requested clarification of this new procedure but at the time of the writing of the book, in June 2008, he had received no response and was still being denied access to the files he had requested.

However, other researchers, including myself, have been able to access the Aborigines Department files to research native title, family history and other matters, after those files have been vetted by AARD. The vetting process has caused some delays, but once a file had been cleared for any one researcher, that file is then open to all other subsequent researchers. The problems that Raynes has encountered should not deter other researchers from applying to access the Aborigines Department records.

Tom Gara
Adelaide

Creating White Australia is a great little book. I use the term ‘little’ literally rather than figuratively. It is a small format book (imagine a page size about three-quarters the size of Aboriginal History journal) containing 12 well-edited, crisply written chapters divided into four sections. And, hallelujah, the footnotes are at the bottom of the page rather than inconveniently clumped at the end of the chapter.

In the introduction, ‘Creating White Australia: new perspectives on race, whiteness and history’, editors Jane Carey and Claire McLisky position the book as the first collection ‘to draw together an array of studies dealing with the question of whiteness in Australian history as their central theme’ (p. ix). From a range of perspectives, the chapters problematise Australian historiography and investigate the mobility and malleability of race in both micro and macro contexts.

The first section locates Australian history in an international context. Ann Curthoys’s chapter leads off with a wide-ranging reflection on the racial layering of settler identities that contextualises and problematises the terms white, British and European. She argues that ‘whiteness always has to be understood relationally, and in process … [and] no racial idea remains dominant forever, and no racial idea ever quite goes away’ (p. 23–24).

Benjamin Mountford and Keir Reeves revisit the history of the Chinese on the Australian goldfields. Arguing that the archives are thin and inadequate sources for writing histories of Chinese experience on the goldfields, they explore the conjunction of biography and landscape as evidence in a case study of community leader, entrepreneur and government employee, Fook Shing.

Leigh Boucher’s chapter criticises the temptation to escape the implication of history in the projects of nation by relocating Australian history in a transnational framework. Focusing on transnationalism at the turn of the nineteenth century, he argues that ‘transnational history’s apparent potential to address myriad political and methodological malaises is only made possible by a serious case of disciplinary amnesia’ (p. 47).

The second and third sections of the book comprise six chapters of Aboriginal history using whiteness as a central category of analysis. Part 2, ‘Whiteness on Indigenous missions and reserves’ has three chapters. Claire McLisky analyses the history of Daniel Matthews’s mission at Maloga in south-western New South Wales. Joanna Cruickshank revisits the history of Ramahyuck mission in Victoria through the letters and diaries of Ellie Hagenauer, daughter of Moravian missionaries, Friedrich and Louise Hagenauer. Fiona Davis explores the effects of whiteness on the research of Joseph Birdsell and Norman Tindale in 1938 at the New South Wales Aboriginal reserve, Cummeragunja.
Part 3 turns to the performance of race in writing and theatre. Tracing the history of public Aboriginal performance of corroborees in the nineteenth century, Maryrose Casey argues that the term ‘theatre’ is assumed to be ‘intrinsically and essentially owned by white ... practitioners’ (p. 124), with the result that the rich history of Aboriginal performances called ‘corroborees’ have not been considered to be Australian theatrical practice. Maggie Scott’s chapter looks at the operation of whiteness in the representations of William Buckley as ‘wild white man’ in the 1830s and 1860s. Jennifer Jones revisits Ella Simon’s autobiography, *Through My Eyes*, tracing its transformation from manuscript to publication and arguing that the editorial process imposed a regime of whiteness on Simon’s narrative.

The last section focuses on the intersection of whiteness and gender. Marguerita Stephens revisits the evidence that Aboriginal mothers practiced infanticide and concludes that it does not support a conclusion that the practice was widespread. Rather, she argues that the practice of infanticide among Aboriginal people was ‘exceptional and incidental’, but became a trope that constructed Aboriginal people as ‘people whose common rights could be morally suspended’ (p. 194). Jane Carey’s chapter examines the discourses circulating in Australian women’s movement organisations in early twentieth century debates on immigration, racial fitness and, to a lesser extent, the Aboriginal question. Her chapter examines how ‘racial thinking inspired reforming agendas and supported white women’s agency’ (p. 198). In the last chapter of the book, ‘Whiteness, maternal feminism and the working mother, 1900–1960’, Shirley Swain, Patricia Grimshaw and Ellen Warne, examine the effects of normalised whiteness in the campaigns of white women in relation to work across the two waves of feminist activism. They argue that the concept of ‘motherhood’ at the centre of activist discourse was specifically white motherhood, a concept that excluded the lives, needs and hopes of women who were not white.

Overall, *Making White Australia* provides a complex and thoughtful addition to the study of race and Australian history. The chapters invite readers to revisit and reimagine familiar histories through the lens of whiteness studies. The book raises many more questions than it resolves and, at times, demonstrates the difficulty of keeping focused on whiteness and resisting the habit of attributing ‘race’ to people who are not white.

Tikka Wilson
National Museum of Australia
Canberra

This conversational little book explores the process of agreement making under the so-called Future Act regime of native title legislation. It is not concerned with negotiations of so-called ‘connection’ aspects of native title, but with those typically conducted between resource companies and Aboriginal parties about land access for mining purposes. Ritter is an experienced native title lawyer with more than a decade as a negotiator, advocate and researcher. This book reflects his experience through anecdotes and enlightening insights into cross-cultural negotiations. His overall thesis, that Future Act negotiations are commercial transactions, is important. It helps us understand why, for example, regular dispute resolution mechanisms are not really suited to this kind of agreement making, which is not so much about finding common ground as about agreeing on a dollar figure.

The book suggests that native title legislation and gradual attitudinal change have produced a shift from a hostile environment, in which resource companies were locked in battle with Aboriginal people, to a situation where land access is generally regulated by agreement (although a quick glance at current disputes in Western and South Australia will show this not to be universally so). A key point, made repeatedly and at length throughout the book, is that such agreements are not the result of some ‘mythical’ corporate reconciliation agenda, but simply the product of legislative requirements and rational business decisions: it is more cost effective and better for the corporate image to come to agreements and acquire a ‘social license’, than to spend time and money fighting Aboriginal people in the courts.

One of the issues I have with this book is the way it is structured around debunking myths. This narrative tool permeates the entire book but is used most explicitly in Chapter 5. Unfortunately, I do not think most of the ‘myths’ Ritter sets up to then debunk have much life beyond his usage of them as straw men. One hapless National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) Member receives a couple of personalised dressing downs for myth creation. The NNTT does like to put its own spin on any agreement it has even the slightest involvement in, but as far as I can tell those actually involved in native title matters always take such pronouncements with a grain of salt.

While Ritter is critical about certain stereotypes (or myths) supposedly being perpetrated about the native title system, some of his assertions about the system seem equally questionable and stereotypical. This may partially be a result of the restrictions on information about typically confidential native title negotiations. These restrictions make it frustratingly difficult for practitioners to learn from experiences elsewhere, make it almost impossible to get a comparative overview of how native title is dealt with across Australia, and may well be restricting Ritter from providing some solid examples to support his arguments. For example, I
would have found it useful to have some supporting facts for the claim that governments are shifting social responsibilities on resource companies, and I found his depiction of corporate approaches to agreement making as purely hard-nosed business decisions just as stereotypical as the myth of corporate do-gooders that he seeks to debunk. A more fine-grained, less polarised analysis, backed up by some detailed case studies would have greatly enhanced this work. Such an analysis might have picked up the fact that South Australia has established an alternative regime that incorporates the Future Act processes into the State’s Mining Act, and explored whether this causes any differences to the negotiation culture or outcomes. Maybe this was beyond the scope of this work, which seems to have been designed as a brief introduction for a non-specialist audience. As such it certainly provides some interesting and accessible insights, but at a level of superficiality and generalisation that will limit its value to the specialist reader.

Kim McCaul
Adelaide

Contesting Native Title is a valuable book both for those unfamiliar with the native title system, and for those working within it who have difficulty seeing the wood for the trees. People who may otherwise find the legal architecture of native title daunting to understand will appreciate David Ritter’s contextualising discussion of relevant political trends and events of historical and legal moment, as well as the clear language with which he expresses complex legal concepts. The breadth of perspective and longitudinal analysis provided by the book will also be welcomed by those whose work involves confined segments of the native title system.

The current culture of agreement-making can lend the appearance of an increasingly settled area of legal practice involving generally equal, freely contracting parties. This is especially so for new generations of practitioners for whom the divisive controversies and early political and legal battles of the 1990s constitute a preliminary footnote in the study of native title. Ritter revives these memories and reinforces their ongoing pertinence. He details the numerous contests, heavy political lobbying and the intricacies of organisational and individual agendas and positioning over the years post-Mabo that all contribute to, but are sometimes overlooked in, the present climate of dispute resolution by consensus. While it is always clear that his insights are moulded by longstanding experience advocating for Indigenous claimants, Ritter nonetheless offers a balanced view of legitimate government and industry concerns and does not shy from a realistic appraisal of native title representative bodies (NTRBs) or what he calls ‘the black leadership’. Disagreement with parts of his argument is inevitable but the writing is designed to leave even acquiescent readers scope for it by attempting to reveal rather than ignore the ideological and economic agendas behind positions adopted (including his own) and by making explicit the contingency of his conclusions and therefore the scope for valid divergence from them.

There is a foreword by Chief Justice Robert French, to whom Ritter was an associate during His Honour’s tenure as the first president of the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT). Aside from the introductory chapter and a brief final section containing reflections on the native title system, the book is organised into chapters that each focus on a significant group of stakeholders or institutions: Indigenous peak bodies, NTRBs, state and territory governments, mining and pastoral industries, the NNTT and the Federal Court. The introductory chapter and prologue read together are as useful for prefiguring and framing Ritter’s preoccupations in the following chapters as they are for their broad overview of the legal and historical circumstances shaping current native title law. Notes are kept to a minimum and confined to the end of the book, and lucid headings frequently punctuate the text which aids readability.
Without enmeshing readers in the technical aspects of the legislation, Ritter conveys the ebb and flow of particular interests being weakened or strengthened by the many amendments that followed the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). He does this by focusing on the practical financial and political effects of the amendments on stakeholder groups and on institutional procedures in the native title system, instead of on the jurisprudence itself (although, clearly, these are linked). Cognisant of the consequences that a lack of resources can have on the conduct and outcome of claims, Ritter identifies the connection between funding levels and sources on the one hand, and the capacity to expedite certain aspects of claims on the other, thereby subtly influencing the direction of claims as well. The acute under-resourcing of NTRBs by the federal government, for instance, engenders the strange situation of claimants’ agents relying partly on financial assistance from respondents in order to advance negotiations. Such ironies that result in practice are often left out of sterile legalistic accounts of the native title system. Ritter is particularly adept at exposing such tensions and contradictions, like the conceptual disjunction of a scheme that requires evidence of a high degree of connection to succeed despite it being designed in part to redress the detrimental impact on connection caused by colonial dispossession and misapplication of the doctrine of *terra nullius*.

There is some discussion of a select few important cases to support his line of reasoning, but the book is not intended to chart the development of case law. The lack of a section dedicated to the federal government is justified to some extent in the chapter on the executive government of the states and territories which notes states’ responsibility for land titles administration and their vested interest as automatic first respondent to native title claims. However, it does leave one wishing that this gap had been better addressed, given that some of the discussion examining the conduct of state and territory governments as parties to mediation and litigation is applicable to the Commonwealth.

Overall, however, the book is an engaging, balanced and astute account of the players, institutions and processes that comprise the native title system. When the regulatory scheme for native title casts parties as litigants contesting the existence of a right, questions of legality tend to dominate accounts of native title. Ritter reasserts the primacy of history and politics as informing and structuring the law, reminding us that the present widespread policy accord on agreement-making is the result of strategic campaigns by parties to affect and direct the functioning of the native title system to their advantage.

Jo-Anne Weinman
Australian National University
On 29 March 2006 the ‘Australia on the Map’ (AOTM) project was launched to commemorate the 400th anniversary of a brief visit by Willem Janszoon of the *Duyfken*. Janszoon was of course a latecomer, arriving tens of thousands of years after the first people settled the land now known as Australia. Remembering and commemoration is a culturally selective process. In highlighting Janszoon’s achievement, the AOTM organisers faced the danger that Indigenous Australians would, by default, be relegated to a minor role in the story of European arrival. Realising the historical injustice of this, the AOTM National Steering Committee organised a two-day conference immediately following the launch of the AOTM project. The conference – ‘Strangers on the Shore’ – sought to bring Indigenous Australians into the picture of historical contact and subsequent invasion. The edited volume of collected papers I review here is the published outcome of that conference. It presents a selection of the papers that were delivered (without the addresses given by Howard Morphy and Marcia Langton), with the addition of prefaces by the Director of the National Museum, the Chair of the National Commemoration Council of the AOTM project, and the Chair of the Strangers on the Shore Conference Planning Group.

Including the introduction, the volume is composed of 15 chapters penned by 18 authors. Authors represent a broad church of intellectual perspectives, including history, anthropology, art history, archaeology, and cultural studies. As might be expected from such a mix, the overarching theme of meetings between Indigenous Australians and Dutch, British, French and Macassan arrivals is addressed by examining various forms of evidence – art, archaeological material, archival documents and oral narratives being the more prominent. Although some chapters are loosely grouped by region, there is no clear ordering principle, so the reader skips from group to group, from topic to topic, and from place to place. There are ways in which the chapters might be gathered together to provide a more cohesive assemblage. One is by the approach authors adopt in tackling their subject matter, so that papers might be grouped into the following perspectives – historical examinations that focus contact within the context of European worldviews; socio-political analyses that situate contact in current debates over interpretation, identity and ownership; and regional case studies that detail remembered or recorded contact events in particular locales.

**Historical examinations**

Understanding encounters between Indigenous Australians and Europeans requires not only an appreciation of the Indigenous world, but also an understanding of European systems of thought and governance. Three chapters provide a European context for the culturally complicated process of contact.
Chapter 2 by Colin Sheehan is a useful historical summary of the origin and operation of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). This gives a plausible explanation of why the Dutch did not settle the Australian continent – there was simply no obvious profit to be made and (interestingly, but not elaborated upon by Sheehan) VOC commanders were instructed to take possession of only those lands not already inhabited (quote from Abel Tasman’s journal at the bottom of p. 22). In Chapter 7 John Mulvaney examines the encounter between French and Indigenous Tasmanians at Recherche Bay, an event – as Mulvaney points out – that has been understated in most historical treatments of the European ‘discovery’ of Australia. The French were meticulous observers and this chapter sets out the details of gift exchange and interaction as seen through the eyes of d’Entrecasteaux and his crew. Mulvaney concludes that this encounter ‘contributed vitally towards fostering an intellectual approach to human society’ (p. 123), and in this the Tasmanians neatly conformed to romantic concepts of Natural Man common in the intellectual circles of France and Britain at the time. That the Tasmanians also incorporated the French in their own myth-making (pp. 122–123) makes for an interesting counter-point. James Warden’s Chapter 14 is another concerned with the belief systems of the European strangers, although in this case he focuses on the British before 1788, specifically Cook, Banks and Dampier. Warden hits home when he states that from our position today all the early European visitors are strangers (p. 209). The British before 1788 were shaped by a world governed by Genesis, the Great Chain of Being and – to a greater or lesser degree – the words of John Locke. This belief system and the mere five encounters between Europeans and Indigenous Australians before 1788 (p. 214) combined to form in the British mind an impression of not only people living in a simple state, but by virtue of their lifestyle existing also at the very bottom of the Divine order of human ‘races’. Warden makes clear that the outcomes for Indigenous Australians were inevitably disastrous as the beliefs of the British ‘all gave structure but were catastrophically contrary to a partnership with the Australians’ (p. 224).

**Socio-political analyses**

A number of chapters in this volume allude to history-writing as a political act that elevates a particular opinion or focus. Three chapters however make this quite explicit, and for this reason are examined here as a separate group. Other than this commonality, the papers are quite distinct. In Chapter 5 Margo Neale explains that her contribution endeavours to ‘look at how Indigenous people engage in self-liberating strategies through visual narrative, by challenging the plot lines of imposed colonial narratives’ (p. 76). Much of this paper concerns a painting by the artist Paddy Fordham Wainbarranga, which is a Yolngu interpretation of the Captain Cook story. In Neale’s analysis this interpretation ‘deliciously subverts whitefella evidentiary-based history and linear chronologies’ (p. 76). Neale investigates meaning in European and contemporary Aboriginal art to illustrate that the former is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) colonialist, and the latter often a vehicle of resistance to colonialism. Although few would take issue with this sentiment, in constructing
the case Neale draws some questionable conclusions. For example, on page 78 the reader is told that historians often diminish Aboriginal stories as myth rather than history, when even a casual acquaintance with the so-called ‘history wars’ shows that Australian historians hold very diverse attitudes toward the use and interpretation of oral history. On page 82 we are informed that in Indigenous history Cook assumes the role of an ancestral being, presumably striking a point of difference with western ‘evidentiary-based’ stories, but in doing so Neale overlooks the European mythologising of Cook in history and art, such as in Philip James De Loutherbourg’s 1785 depiction *Apotheosis of Captain Cook*. And the conclusion reached on page 85 that Wainburranga’s history telling has only a remote chance of being considered a legitimate form of history in formal Australian teaching and learning situations must surely be open to debate. Overly generalised statements such as these detract from the important points Neale seeks to drive home.

The other two papers I see as framing history in contemporary debates are Chapters 9 and 13. Both examine case-specific encounters in situations of history-making in today’s society. Campbell Macknight in Chapter 9 returns to his haunts of northern Australia and nineteenth century to early twentieth century contact between Indigenous Australians and Makassar-based trepangers. Much of this chapter is devoted to setting out four new insights on this contact situation, that Macknight identifies as: the chronological origins of the trepang industry in northern Australia; the industry in the context of the economic development of south-east Asia and China; the impact of diseases introduced into northern Australia; and the changes that contact brought to Aboriginal society. These four insights synthesise studies by a number of commentators over the last decade or so, and set out the new information, perspectives and debates they have brought to the examination of Asian contact with the north. The chapter’s title – ‘Harvesting the memory’ – relates mainly to the final six pages. Here Macknight strikes out into new and fascinating territory to examine how the historical event of trepanger contact with Indigenous Australians is used to promote national and regional identity, both in Australia and Indonesia. Chapter 13 by historian Maria Nugent offers a perspective on the recasting of the landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay from a clash of cultures to a less belligerent meeting of different peoples. The chapter sets out to strip away popular interpretations (p. 200) by re-examining the events over the week in 1770 which Cook and his crew spent in Botany Bay. Nugent uses the straightforward device of re-examining the journals of Cook and Joseph Banks to show that this case of culture contact was not the one-sided affair often portrayed. The conclusion is drawn that both cultures sought to control the engagement, and that the Indigenous people Cook encountered did this by non-violent means – including ‘retreat’ – to leave the door open for establishing relations with the strangers (p. 206).

**Regional studies**

Eight of the 14 substantive chapters can be grouped as regional case studies that examine contact in specific localities. These are situated accounts that seek
to explore the nature of contact using the tools of ethnography, historiography and archaeology. Three chapters are explicitly archaeological. In Chapter 6 Jo McDonald identifies European contact in the rock art of the Sydney region. There are only 37 motifs (28 if the ‘rabbits’ are not rabbits; McDonald is equivocal on this – Table 6.1 and p. 104) to work from, so the dataset is relatively slim. The suggestion is made that this paucity of contact art reflects a truncation of the social context of art production (p. 110), possibly caused by the ‘disintegration’ (p. 100) of Indigenous society soon after European contact, coupled with a lack of engagement with the British (p. 108). However, McDonald does recount historically recorded interaction, including the well known relationship between Bennelong and Governor Phillip. As is often the case, tension clearly exists between the archaeological and historical evidence. Chapter 8 is a study by the maritime archaeologist Mark Staniforth of culture contact at South Australian whaling stations. The archaeological component takes back seat to the much more fulsome historical records. One of the more interesting facts these illuminate is that a degree of symbiosis existed between whalers and Indigenous Australians, with whalers hunting for the blubber and baleen and the Indigenous communities assisting for the whale meat. Chapter 15 by Michael McCarthy presents a summary of a three stage Australian Contact Shipwrecks Program, a program in which the first stage has been completed and the third stage (collecting Indigenous narratives of shipwreck events) is awaiting full commencement. It is a shame this second stage had not been completed by the conference as it would have made a valuable addition to the volume.

Taking a somewhat different approach to the topic, three chapters examine past and contemporary narratives of contact. Peter Sutton, in a wide-ranging paper that forms Chapter 3, writes of Indigenous memories of Dutch arrivals in Cape York Peninsula. Sutton draws on a number of lines of information, including his own and others’ anthropological investigations and historical studies of Dutch contact. Indigenous responses to the Dutch – the ‘stories about feeling’ – are examined from the observations recorded by the visitors. After reviewing information from across Australia, Sutton concludes that these responses were attempts by Indigenous Australians to situate Europeans within the Indigenous world as the ghosts of returned ancestors (p. 54). This theory requires testing, and needs to be read in the context of James Warden’s account in Chapter 14 of how the first British voyagers were interpreted as not ghosts or spirits but living animal-like beings (p. 213). Sutton’s chapter concludes with speculation on how events may have unfolded if colonial cultures other than the British had colonised Australia, advancing a perhaps controversial proposition that the outcome would have been the same irrespective of whether the Dutch or British had invaded (p. 55).

The other two anthropological papers draw much more upon the authors’ investigations of primary sources. In Chapter 4 historian Fiona Skyring and anthropologist Sarah Yu describe early contact between Kimberley people and Europeans. Written observations and oral history are used to provide a rich and fascinating account of the complexities of cultural articulation in (to Europeans,
at least) a remote location. This chapter is solidly researched, well written, and stands out as a major contribution. In another important contribution, Ian McIntosh in Chapter 11 examines tales of pre-Macassan contact with the Yolngu of north-east Arnhem Land. Admitting the limitations of interpretations based on material evidence of contact, McIntosh draws on Yolngu oral tradition to describe how these people have created a ‘sacred pre-Macassan “history”’ (p. 167) which they use to contrast their later interactions with Macassans, Japanese and Europeans. This history, centred on the locality of Dholotji (Cape Wilberforce), speaks of a golden time of peace and abundance. It is a history, McIntosh suggests, that alludes to early contact events that Yolngu use and have used to construct a vision of the future, a future in which the injustices stemming from later contacts will be overcome.

The remaining two papers that might be categorised as regional studies are Chapters 10 and 12. These two chapters stand apart from the others as they seek to investigate the contact experience not by interrogating the records of the participants to that experience, but rather by invoking reinterpretation and remembering. In a paper that strikes me as one in which some potentially interesting ideas need to be further articulated, Anne Clark and Ursula Frederick in Chapter 10 read interpretations and recording of Groote Eylandt rock art as acts of ‘performance’. Their thesis is that the way in which rock art has been ‘recorded, described, presented, illustrated, published and read’ is in itself a ‘performance of cross-cultural relationships’ (p. 152). Of the many people who have recorded and studied Groote Eylandt art (including themselves), Clark and Frederick choose to focus on three of the earliest – William Westall, Norman Tindale and Frederick McCarthy. The paper proceeds to analyse the studies of these three researchers; the art recording of William Westall, on whose work conclusions are drawn largely it seems from those reached by Findlay in 1998, was ‘curiously disengaged’ (p. 157) from his subject matter; Tindale ‘created practices of documentation and curation’ (p. 160); and McCarthy ‘quite literally engaged in a performance with the art through his process of recording and reproducing the drawings’ (p. 162). We will never know what Westall, Tindale and McCarthy may have thought of this analysis of their work as cross-cultural performance. Whether or not the chapter accurately captures their intentions and biases remains open to interpretation. Yet, there is a place for ethnography in reading performance. The Groote Eylandt community will have memories of the visits of Tindale and McCarthy, and there are people alive today who have interpreted, described and analysed Groote Eylandt art. I cannot help but ask why the authors did not interleave their analysis of the archives and documents with oral information pertaining to the production, recording and interpretation of rock art. This would have made for an intellectually more satisfying treatment.

Chapter 12 by Len Collard and Dave Palmer is another that sets an interesting course but requires a little more navigation to reach its destination. The chapter concerns Nyungar memories of the landing of European explorers on the south-west coast of what is now Western Australia. The opening paragraphs contain an explanation that the authors present their evidence from different
perspectives and then seek to meet in a third place, ‘somewhere in the middle’ (p. 181), where they aim to speak together. The two spaces of the authors are the written recorded events of exploration (mainly derived from secondary sources) which are presumably the domain of Palmer, and the thoughts of Collard who (with Palmer) takes ‘some licence to reinterpret how Nyungar may well have made some sense of the visitors from the ocean’ (p. 181). The question is how much licence has been taken. Collard is an Indigenous Australian scholar, but the reader is left uninformed as to how much the text portrays the collective memories of the Nyungar community. I and other non-Nyungar readers have no right to question the veracity of the myths and imaginings (p. 182) called up in this chapter, but the reader should be given an assurance that these memories are community-held ones. The chapter also needs to provide further discussion of the third space that the authors introduce as the meeting place of their discourses. I had difficulty understanding how this other space might be realised, or even if it needs to be realised. In the brave not-so-new world of post-modernity there is room for conflicting narratives to co-exist in their own respective spaces.

In summary, this volume does – as Craddock Morton writes in the preface – present a ‘highly textured terrain’ that successfully captures the wide compass of culture contact studies, at least as the field stands at the moment. To achieve this representation the editors have had to assume licence to include some works in progress that would be better suited to a different mode of presentation, as well as including some papers that, to do justice to their topics, require a more lengthy treatment than possible in an edited collection. Nevertheless, the papers overall provide stimulating perspectives on culture contact, and a number are real gems that will undoubtedly be remembered for their significant contribution to this area of research.

Clayton Fredericksen
Canberra
After observing the Transit of Venus in Tahiti, Lieutenant James Cook, the Ulysses of the English Enlightenment, chose a detour that took his discovery ship HM Bark *Endeavour* and crew to New Zealand and east to a coast previously known only to its Indigenous inhabitants.

Cook’s first contact with the people of Kamay/Botany Bay was also the first conflict between locals and strangers. It set a precedent for countless ‘first encounters’ that would take place across the continent. It inaugurated modern Australia and its history. ‘In this way’, wrote historian Manning Clark almost 200 years later in *A History of Australia* (1972), ‘the European began his tragic association with the aborigines on the east coast’.

Nugent’s previous book, *Botany Bay: Where Histories Meet* (Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2005), established her reputation as a historian who retrieves insights from the multiple ‘pasts’ associated with the first meeting place between two cultures. Her empathy for the place itself and members of the present Aboriginal community is tangible. In this book she navigates through the risky currents spanning history, historiography, spatial history, anthropology and the powerful and ever-present ‘always beginning – never ending’ of Aboriginal oral tradition and myth.

Nugent writes: ‘The voyagers’ interactions and relations with the locals have often been little more than a footnote, mentioned but dismissed as unimportant or non-existent or, if examined at all, largely misconstrued.’ In a scholarly reinterpretation of Cook’s eight days and nights at Botany Bay in 1770, she seeks to recover, or at least to restore, historical balance between the view from the beach and the gaze from the ship.

Cook aimed ‘To try to form some connections with the natives’, but the Aboriginal people kept their distance, advancing and retreating, but pulling back from any positive contact. The *Endeavour* journals record a series of encounters in which both groups failed to meet each other and Cook was forced to conclude: ‘We could know very little of their customs as we were never able to form any connections with them’.

‘By day eight, after a week in each other’s presence’, writes Nugent, ‘the distance between the strangers and the locals that existed from the outset had not been bridged.’ However, history does not end when Cook steers his ship north from Botany Bay, because stories about the other, mythological, ‘Captain Cook’ continue in Aboriginal communities throughout Australia today. To quote the master, the late and lamented Greg Dening: ‘Cook is a man of myth. Cook is a man of anti-myth.’
Percy Mumbulla spins his Captain Cook stories and passes on those of his father King Jacky Mumbulla of Wallaga Lake to the poet Roland Robinson, like that of Tungeei of Ulladulla about Aborigines rejecting the terrible hard biscuits and throwing them back at Cook. In Percy’s version the Aborigines kill Cook, just as Hawaiians at Kealakekua Bay killed him on 14 February 1779. While James Cook spent a week at Botany Bay and left in relative peace, the new ‘Captain Cooks’ steal Aboriginal women and kill, creating an alternative oral history.

Notably missing from the oral stories is one that was told in Dharawal by Emma Timbery to schoolteacher and linguist Mary Everitt, who wrote in a letter to AG Stephen, editor of the Bulletin on 12 June 1901: ‘They have many absurd stories as to Cook’s blowing up men with gunpowder and so on’. Everitt had told Stephens on 9 April that year that Emma Timbery ‘told me the story spontaneously, more than a year ago; and repeated it last Saturday week.’ Everitt had the story translated, but Stephen did not publish her article.

Emma’s story concerns a wooden cask of gunpowder left with a burning fuse by Cook’s sailors at the watering place at Kundal/Kurnell (perhaps to enlarge the spring). It would have killed any curious ‘natives’ that came close enough to examine it, but the local Aborigines wisely stayed in the nearby bushes as the sailors rowed back to the ship and the cask exploded without causing any damage. Everett’s original letters are now in the Hayes Collection of the Fryer Library at the University of Queensland Library at St Lucia, Brisbane.

Captain Cook Was Here is a beautifully realised hardback edition that reproduces many colour illustrations of people, places and artefacts that complement and extend the historical narrative. They include the key visual images of Aboriginal men in canoes painted by the Tahitian naïve artist Tupaia and pencil sketches by Sydney Parkinson at Botany Bay in 1770. I was privileged to bring these two originals from the British Library to Australia for the Eora: Mapping Aboriginal Sydney exhibition at the Mitchell Library, Sydney, in 2006.

In her detailed deconstruction of the confrontation on that first day (26 March), Nugent suggests that the two brave Gweagal who faced Cook’s muskets were prepared for a confrontation and had ‘stashed their spears conveniently close by’. Parkinson’s sketches surely depict these two men and show one poising a fishing spear in his woomerah, so it seems more likely that they snatched up their weapons on the spur of the moment.

Nugent is not generous with her attributions. She cites Djon Mundine and myself (twice) without fully acknowledging the exhibition Lines in the Sand, curated by Ace Bourke at the Hazlehurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre in 2008, which displayed the illustrations reproduced in this work, including Daniel Boyd’s wry takes on conventional history painting.

The Kameygal and Gweagal were able to reclaim Botany Bay for 18 more years before more foreign ships came into the bay. Nugent concludes:
Away from this place and some time later, the *Endeavour*’s voyage under Cook’s command would directly and indirectly set in train a whole series of decisions and events and processes that in a roundabout and unpredictable way lead to a decision being made in England to establish a colony for convicts at Botany Bay. But that is another story.

Stories make the Indigenous world and storytelling keeps that world alive. In the words of Billy Gibbs, an Aboriginal man from the Western Desert, ‘Captain Cook made the country a different story’. Nugent succeeds in making the Captain Cook story a different history.

Keith Vincent Smith
Sydney

Accounts of the experiences of shipwreck survivors and convict escapees who spent substantial periods living with Aboriginal people form a distinct genre within Australia’s early ethnographic and ethnohistorical texts. Stephanie Anderson’s book Pelletier: the Forgotten Castaway of Cape York is an important addition to this corpus. As the title suggests, this is a book about someone who has been neglected in Australia’s records. A survey of the research literature shows that this is indeed the case. Narcisse Pelletier, who lived with Aboriginal people in Cape York from 1858 to 1875, is given relative prominence among the ‘wild whitemen’ mentioned in Heaton’s Australian Dictionary of Dates and Men of the Time (1879) in that almost a full column is devoted to him, while others each receive a mere paragraph. However, until the publication of Stephanie Anderson’s book, accounts about this man and his experiences such as that presented in Sir Ralph Cilento’s pamphlet ‘Wild White Men’ in Queensland (1970[1959]), have been limited by the information available in the Australian records.

Narcisse Pelletier was born in 1844 and grew up in France, in the seaside village of Saint-Gilles, where his father worked as a shoemaker. Pelletier went to sea at an early age and in 1858 took the post of cabin boy on the Saint-Paul. On what was to be its last voyage, the Saint-Paul sailed from Marseilles to Bombay, where it delivered a cargo of wine. From there, it went to Hong Kong, where it took on board 300 Chinese workers bound for the New South Wales goldfields. Halfway through the voyage to Sydney, the Saint-Paul was wrecked on the Louisiade Archipelago, off the south-eastern tip of New Guinea. How Pelletier survived this shipwreck and then spent 17 years living with Aboriginal people in eastern Cape York and what happened to him after his removal from Cape York in 1875 are some of the subjects explored in this book.

Pelletier’s experiences were first published in French in 1876 in a limited edition of a small booklet written by Constant Merland and entitled Dix-Sept Ans Chez Les Sauvages Les Aventures di Narcisse Pelletier. Constant Merland stated that this book was based on information gathered during his conversations with Pelletier and Pelletier’s notes about his experiences. Regrettably, after the publication Merland’s book, apart from Edouard Garnier’s attempt to elicit information from Pelletier in relation to four Aboriginal songs, no one else appears to have sought further information from him. A new edition of Merland’s book, edited by Philippe Pécot, was published in 2001. This is also in the French language. Stephanie Anderson is critical of this edition’s misrepresentation of Pelletier as living with a ‘cannibal tribe’ and its inclusion of an Appendix of irrelevant ethnographic material derived from Carl Lumholtz’s 1889 Among Cannibals.

1 One book that attempts to consider all these persons is Barrett 1948.
Stephanie Anderson’s Pelletier: the Forgotten Castaway of Cape York presents the first English translation of Merland’s book and has thus made this important French record accessible to Australia’s majority non-French reading public. Her book, however, is much more than a translation of Merland’s book. It also presents her considerable historical research about Pelletier and the ethnographic research of the anthropologist Athol Chase about the Pama Malngkana (the Sandbeach People), who gave succour to the debilitated, abandoned cabin boy and subsequently adopted him into their society. Athol Chase has contributed the section ‘Pama Malngkana: the “Sandbeach People” of Cape York’ and also photographs. As Stephanie Anderson states on page 7 of the Acknowledgements, ‘Anyone reading this book will see the imprint of Athol’s work throughout its pages.’

The book is organised into two main parts. Part One contains two essays (the first by Anderson, the second by Chase) that provide readers with the ethnohistorical and ethnographic background in which to locate Anderson’s translation of the Merland text (which is Part Two). The book also has two maps, six appendices, numerous endnotes, a bibliography and lastly, a note on the translation. This note would be better placed after the acknowledgements, as it pertains particularly to the extensive annotations that are interpolated throughout the translation.

The opening essay in Part One, ‘The Two Lives of Narcisse Pelletier’ gives an account of the early life of Narcisse Pelletier, his shipwreck, his adoption by Aboriginal people, his discovery and removal from their society, and what happened to him after his return to France. It also includes information about the Australian records made about Pelletier shortly after his removal from Cape York. The following essay ‘Pama Malngkana: the Sandbeach People of Cape York’ considers the identity and location of the Aboriginal people who adopted Pelletier and reasons for the neglect of Pelletier in the research records. Among topics considered in this section are family and territorial ownership in this area, spiritual life, land and sea resources, initial and later contact with Europeans, church and state interventions into Aboriginal life, and Archibald Meston’s research about Pelletier.

Chase’s consideration of the historical and ethnographic records (which include his own research) found that Pelletier’s account, as presented by Constant Merland, is authentic, and, apart from a geographical error, factually correct. The geographical error in Merland’s account is the identification of the place where Saint-Paul crew abandoned Pelletier as Cape Flattery. Chase found a high correlation between the historical and ethnographic records that this place is Red Rocky Point, which is just south of Cape Direction. In this respect, Anderson’s book also has a geographical error – the location of Captain Billy as an Aboriginal man speaking broken English among Aboriginal people met at Temple Bay by Robert Logan Jack in 1880 (p. 109). Jack did meet Captain Billy, but in the Shelburne Bay region which is north of Temple Bay, and named a creek to commemorate this event.2

2 Jack 1921 vol II: 589–593.
Chase raises the possibility that Archibald Meston’s statement in 1923 that the Pelletier story was a fabrication might have contributed to the lack of interest in Australia about Pelletier. Another contributing reason might be his finding that the family group (clan) who adopted Pelletier had become extinct.

Part Two comprises Stephanie Anderson’s translation of the Constant Merland book. This translation is interspersed with annotations, including excerpts drawn from the research of Athol Chase, Bruce Rigsby, David Thomson and Peter Sutton. These annotations are clearly marked as such in the text, and greatly contribute to the text. They not only illuminate and authenticate Merland’s account, but also expand on matters mentioned by Merland, and in many instances, provide a historical dimension and show the continuities and transformations in Aboriginal culture in that area.

Merland’s account introduces the reader to Pelletier and the events leading up to his abandonment on the east coast of Cape York. Merland’s statement, made in 1876, is as relevant today as it was then:

It is no longer the cabin boy Narcisse Pelletier who will be the subject of our discussion but Amglo, citizen of the tribe of Ohantaala. His personality will often recede into the background as we turn to the description of the customs, habits and beliefs of tribes among whom civilisation has not yet penetrated. A curious study, then, whose elements had been lacking until today and which certainly deserves to gain the attention of the public. (pp. 155–156 Anderson translation)

Then follow several chapters of ethnographic interest about the Aboriginal society of which Pelletier became a member, including social and territorial organisation, property, marriage, food gathering, conflict and punishments. This information dominates the text, and there are only glimpses of what Pelletier’s experiences. Thus we learn that he was adopted by one of the men who had found him, and that Sassy, the son of his adopted father’s brother, became a ‘true and faithful friend … the bonds of kinship having brought them together’ (p. 179). Pelletier learnt how to become a valuable and contributing member of his Aboriginal society, and, from his cicatrices, was an initiated man. Not everyone was kind to him and his skin colour, his superior arrow-making skills and his ablution habits drew negative comments, and he was punished for breaking a food taboo. The punishment led to the development of ulcers over the lower part of one of his legs, which from the description might have been yaws. Merland noted that Pelletier still suffered from an ulcerated leg (p. 182) when he interviewed him in 1876.

Merland reported that he was married, according to custom, to a young girl, who was about seven years old when Pelletier was removed from the area. In Merland’s view, her young age was proof that the ‘union was in name only [and that] Pelletier will therefore be able to contract a marriage in France without fear of being pursued for bigamy’ (p. 184).
Is Merland’s book a straight record of what Pelletier said, or is it based on what Pelletier said with Merland’s interpretation of this? Anderson states that ‘I believe that Merland is a straightforward reporter of what Pelletier told him’ and that Merland based his book on Pelletier’s notes and from conversations with Pelletier (p. 26). Anderson addresses some of the shortcomings of Merland’s account such as his incorrect identification of the location of Pelletier’s landing as Cape Flattery and the omission of personal and ethnographic information recorded from Pelletier, published in contemporary Australian newspapers. These might not have been accessible to Merland. Fortunately for readers today, Anderson includes the principal of these in her book as appendices and provides information from others in her main text (see, for example, her reference to Aplin’s report on pp. 43–44).

Anderson’s research supplements and complements her translation of Merland’s book. Merland’s account omits details of what happened after Pelletier was found on Night Island. Drawing on Australian and French sources, Anderson has filled these gaps. She describes how unlike other Europeans who had rejoined European society after living for considerable periods with Aboriginal people, Pelletier did not leave his Aboriginal people willingly (pp. 42–46). Although she described the removal of Pelletier from Night Island as the ‘recovery’, it is clear from her account that the John Bell crew did not so much rescue him, as unwittingly kidnap him (p. 306) and that he was taken away against his will, and that he made several attempts to escape. Anderson’s discovery of a record that Pelletier had left behind two or three children in Cape York (p. 46) suggests a possible reason for his unwillingness to be rescued.

Anderson describes Pelletier’s difficulties with adjusting to European life. His apparent loss of language amazed those who found him and excited the interest of academics. No one, however, in France seems to have been aware that this loss was also experienced by others who had been ‘recovered’ after years spent living with Aboriginal people. Anderson also considers Pelletier’s reported reticence to provide information about his experiences to people in Australia. She suggests several reasons for this such as his need to distance himself from being typecast as a ‘white savage’ and to re-establish himself in European society; the social distance between himself and those who interviewed him; and the trauma of his involuntary return to European society.

Anderson notes some significant omissions in Merland’s account – there is no mention of totemic ancestors, totemic sites, Culture Heroes, initiation ceremonies and so forth (p. 55). She considers that his reticence on such matters is indicative of his continuing adherence to Uutaalnganu beliefs and values in the months following his recovery from Cape York.

Another significant omission, not mentioned by Anderson, is the visit by Captain Banner, in command of the Julia Percy to Night Island and the adjacent mainland in 1860. On board the Julia Percy was John MacGillivray, who had been a zoologist on the HMS Rattlesnake and who had participated in the rescue
of another shipwreck survivor – Barbara Thompson – at Cape York in 1849. MacGillivray’s account of this visit provides the earliest detailed description of the Aborigines in this area, and suggests the probability that one of those encountered was Narcisse Pelletier. MacGillivray reported how while the party was exploring the mainland, they encountered:

a mob of Australian natives (about 150 in number, as I afterwards ascertained), daubed and streaked with white paint, each man with his throwing stick and bundle of spears. … Being the only one of out party who knew how to deal with wild Australian natives otherwise than by shooting them, I was allowed to manage the business as I thought proper. […] After distributing some fish hooks among the elders, and going through as many antics and grimaces as a buffoon, patting the old fellows on the head and breast, we became famous friends, the whole of us talking loudly and promiscuously, of course in mutually unintelligible language. A sort of confidence being thus established, others came forward. … Having established tolerably satisfactory relations – a sort of armed neutrality – we parted, as it was getting near sunset. […] We had not gone far when a confused noise behind announced the reappearance of the blacks closely following us, each with his bundle of spears in his left hand, and the throwing stick and one spear shipped in the other. … By dint of keeping the Australians in good humour, laughing away as if unconcerned, and betraying no sign of fear … as well as keeping close to an elderly gentleman whom I had selected as the first victim should hostilities commence, we got on pretty well … We induced about sixty of the mob to accompany us along the beach to the boats, where we gave the elderly ones biscuit, strips of calico, fish-hooks, and a knife or two, and parted good friends. … They were generally well made for Australians. None of those we saw exceeded five feet seven inches in height. The moustache and beard were usually very scanty: the hair of the head had not been subjected to any peculiar treatment; the artificially raised scars on the body and arms were few in number; circumcision or any analogous rite had not been practised; but the loss of the upper front tooth was universal among the men. One man was light enough to have been a half-caste, but he shunned observation, and got out of the way when I wished to examine him closely.

This book contains numerous historical and ethnographic references, for most of which there are endnotes. Some references however have no explanatory note. For example, there is a reference on page 29 to Buckley, but no explanatory note about him. I found that consultation of the endnotes interrupted my reading of the main text and detracted from the pleasure of reading this book. Future editions of this book might consider the substitution of footnotes for the endnotes.

3 See MacGillivray 1852.
4 John MacGillivray, ‘Wanderings in tropical Australia no. II’, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 January 1862.
An inconsistent style of referencing in these endnotes detracts from the academic value of the book. In some, the author’s name is provided, in other, the titles only of source material. The reader then has to either scan the bibliography or search the library catalogues to locate the author. For example, endnote 9 on page 318 refers to an article ‘Anthropology through a biological lens 2005: 17’. This article was written by Athol Chase and appears in a book entitled Donald Thomson: the Man and Scholar and edited by Bruce Rigsby and Nicolas Peterson, Canberra: Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia with support from Museum Victoria, c2005, p. 17–28. Future editions might consider using a different and consistent system of referencing.

Despite these few shortcomings associated with presentation, this book is a most valuable addition to Australia’s ethnohistorical and ethnographic records. Stephanie Anderson’s book not only restores Pelletier to his prominence in Australia’s ethnohistorical records, but also shows just how valuable these early accounts are with respect to authenticating and appreciating contemporary records of Aboriginal society and culture.

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Fiona Powell
Canberra
This is a wonderful book. It begins and ends with personal, poignant stories about Evans’s own work with last speakers and last hearers in small speech communities in Australia. He emphasises that when a language disappears, it is not only its speakers who die but all of the knowledge and ways of knowing that die with them. In order to show how and why this is so, Evans canvases many issues in the nature and culture of language, languages and linguistics and the relations between these studies and other disciplines, particularly cognitive science and archaeology. Along the way, the book considers case studies in some detail from all the continents and briefer examples are illustrated with apposite anecdotes. This is story telling of the highest quality – with each story told in its relevant language, together with a translation – but it is also text with some messages of great importance.

Multilinguality is almost inevitable in many situations, particularly in small scale societies where spouses may be derived from socially separate groups (p. 9), but even allowing for this, there is substantial evidence of creative differentiation between groups through language novelties (p. 13). This is undoubtedly part of the reason for the enormous linguistic diversity in many regions (p. 14) though, if I have a criticism of the book it would be that it is relatively uncurious about how that diversity may have occurred over time.

William von Humbolt is said to have recognised that human cognition could not be understood from the knowledge expressed in only one language, but must be considered across all languages (p. 36). Several worked examples show, for example, how different the world looks when you reckon directions in relation to yourself (as we do) rather than in relation to cardinal points (as the Guugu-Yimithirr do) (pp. 163–169). Chomsky’s approach to the problem of the complexities of language was to propose that humans have some innate structure that permits the parsing of the languages they hear such that they can learn the language they are brought up in. Most importantly, Evans and Levinson have drawn attention to the way in which all the central assumptions of Chomsky’s arguments are untenable when the whole range of languages is considered however well they may work for a limited range of languages.¹ To Evans’s credit, he does not let this argument become the dominant theme of this book, though it could have been. Particularly relevant to the question of the cognitive implications of different languages are the questions of social relationship and how they are computed. Evans deals with this at length in Chapter 4 with an important model for social cognition in grammar in Figure 4.2 (p. 77).

¹ Evans and Levinson 2009.
An indication, admittedly at a fairly low level, of the impoverishment of not knowing the ways in which different languages handle reality is given by the different verbs used to describe the motion of different species of kangaroo and wallaby in the Arnhem Land language Kunwinjku (p. 57). Without knowing the various ways in which people differentiate the variation visible in the world around them, how could archaeologists contemplating the visual representation of kangaroos and wallabies in rock art hope to understand what parts of the variation were being represented long in the past?

Part III is a good discussion of the relationship between linguistics and archaeology with a section on decipherment (Chapter 7) which might fill young people with wonder in the way that I remember being filled with wonder by *The Decipherment of Linear B*.\(^2\) It is a welcome change to have historical linguistics come to the fore in the study of Australian languages, particularly given the strength of the contribution to understanding New Guinea and Pacific history through linguistics. A weakness might be that there is little discussion of the strong statistical methods currently being applied in our region.\(^3\) Non-linguists, such as me, would appreciate a quick guide to the strengths and weaknesses of such approaches.

Section IV deals with further aspects of language and cognition, tackling head on the issues that were originally associated with the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language has a dominant influence on thought, maintained in the urban myth that Eskimos have dozens of words for snow.\(^4\) The view was ‘trashed’ (Evans’s word) by Stephen Pinker in *The Language Instinct* (1994) ‘There is no scientific evidence that languages dramatically shape speakers’ way of thinking’ though Pinker subsequently devoted a book to just that concept.\(^5\) Here, Evans shows that the issues are much more complex and much more subtle than any of these views.

Two things struck me as weaknesses of the book. First, although the technical language needed to understand the argument is spelled out clearly, there is still a lot of technical language that is not spelled out (particularly about orthography and phonetics). This has the virtue that a reader will not get bogged down in minutiae and we can romp through the book to get its more important messages. The second is that there may be too many topics. Many of the issues are dealt with rather summarily and leave the reader wishing for more. Again, this is a good fault that permits a wide audience to understand the issue and then go looking for the specialist publications that expand on that issue. Commendably, all stories are in their original languages, including several in obscure scripts. It is a little curious, though, that despite the use of, for example, printed scripts of Caucasian Albanian and Epi-Olmec, both extinct and of rather small extension,

\(^2\) Chadwick 1961.
\(^3\) See for example Atkinson et al 2010; Reesink et al 2009.
\(^5\) Pinker 2007.
there were two quotations (in my copy) which had been pasted in, one in Arabic and the other in Hebrew, both, I would have thought, languages with a vibrant printed tradition.

At the end of the book, Evans wonders out loud whether he should have devoted his time to doing more work with some last speakers, and friends, who had passed away, instead of writing the book. My answer to his rhetorical question is this. The book is so elegantly written, so easy to read, and canvasses so much that a beginning student of linguistics needs to know that it was probably the best investment in the future of dying languages that he could have made. If it encourages only two people to venture into those lonely seats in the dust to help people record their knowledge of the world in language that no one will ever hear once they are gone, then he will have an adequate return on his investment. I am sure it will.

References


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Contributors

David Brooks has been working for 25 years as an anthropologist in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and other parts of central Australia, primarily on land-related matters, including the writing of native title claim reports. David is currently completing a doctorate in anthropology at the Australian National University, investigating Ngaanyatjarra and Pintupi social life and land tenure. In addition, he continues research into a range of matters to do with the cultural and social life and well-being of remote Aboriginal communities. He has a long term commitment to contributing to the building of partnerships and structures aimed at ensuring the prosperity and vitality of the Ngaanyatjarra region.

Felicity Jensz completed her PhD at the University of Melbourne in 2007. She is an Honorary Fellow in The School of Historical Studies at the same university and currently holds a position as a Research Fellow at the Exzellenzcluster: Religion und Politik, Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Germany. She has published widely on Moravian missionaries in the nineteenth century. Her book German Moravian Missionaries in the British Colony of Victoria, Australia, 1848-1908 was published by Brill in 2010.

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Ann McGrath is the Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous History at the Australian National University. She has written, edited and co-authored numerous books and articles on Aboriginal history, including 'Born in the Cattle': Aborigines in Cattle Country (1987) which won the inaugural WK Hancock Prize and Contested Ground: Aborigines under the British Crown (1995). She served as an expert witness on the Gunner & Cubillo case, has worked on land claims and as an historian for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Her most recent book, co-authored with Ann Curthoys, is How to Write History that People Want To Read (2009).

Pamela Faye McGrath has recently completed an interdisciplinary doctoral thesis investigating the history of filming and photography of Aboriginal families in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands at the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, Australian National University. She has over ten years experience working as an applied anthropologist on a range of native title, cultural heritage and community-based conservation projects in Victoria, Western Australia, Queensland and southern Africa.
Jessie Mitchell is working on a research project considering the relationship between nineteenth-century Indigenous policy and the arrival of responsible government in the colonies. She has also written about early Indigenous missions and protectorates, political anniversary celebrations during the 1950s, and the curious history of alpacas in colonial Australia.

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Information for authors

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Footnote style


2. Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.


4. Evening Mail, 12 March 1869.

5. Solly to Stokell, 4 March 1869, AOTCSD 7/23/127.

Footnote numbers are placed after punctuation marks in the text. Please do not use ibid. or similar abbreviations, but repeat the short citation.

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