

Aboriginal History

Volume thirty 2006

Aboriginal History Incorporated

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Aboriginal History is a refereed journal that presents articles and information in Australian ethnohistory and contact and post-contact history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Historical studies based on anthropological, archaeological, linguistic and sociological research, including comparative studies of other ethnic groups such as Pacific Islanders in Australia, are welcomed. Subjects include recorded oral traditions and biographies, narratives in local languages with translations, previously unpublished manuscript accounts, archival and bibliographic articles, and book reviews.

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This volume of the journal is formally dated 2006, but is published in 2007.

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Aboriginal History Inc. is a part of the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University and gratefully acknowledges the support of the History Program, RISS and the National Centre for Indigenous Studies, Australian National University.

WARNING: Readers are notified that this publication may contain names or images of deceased persons.

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Typesetting: Tikka Wilson

Cover design: Dick Barwick

Printed in Australia by ANU Printing, Canberra

ISSN 0314-8769

Cover: The wedding of Susie Murray and George Patten, 1940. Image courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Alick Jackomos Collection (image number N3747.08a). Reproduced courtesy of Herbie Patten.

Aboriginal History

Volume 30 2006



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Preface

On 'Exchanging histories'

Since WEH Stanner drew attention to the prevailing 'Great Australian Silence' in the late 1960s,¹ it has been the subject of much historical commotion. Indeed, many non-Indigenous historians have been so focussed upon revising and interpreting the Indigenous 'silences' of the official archival records that they have not heard the racket being made by Indigenous artists, performers, biographers, poets, filmmakers and even footballers and their spectators. We welcome these voices, and timely discussions of them, into *Aboriginal History*, volume 30. This volume explores issues primarily relating to non-textual modes of Aboriginal historical practice. It is inspired by our Australian Research Council Project, 'Unsettling histories: Indigenous modes of historical practice',² which aims to encourage an appreciation of Indigenous historical interpretations in a variety of formats.

This special themed volume of *Aboriginal History* also marks the thirtieth edition of the journal. In 1977, when it was first published, the dominant assumption was that there could be no Aboriginal history, only Aboriginal culture. Since then, *Aboriginal History* has been an important player in the development of a fresh genre of Australian history. The journal's editorial Board and its published content have been multi-disciplinary and wide-ranging. Embracing an inclusive definition of what constitutes 'history', historical style and methodology, *Aboriginal History* has opened new doors for scholarship. Indigenous historians have used various story-telling techniques, from spoken narratives with translations by linguists, to a focus on art, music and material evidence as historical sources. In keeping with the emphasis of the journal's early volumes, we aim to involve writers and scholars from a range of heritages and disciplinary backgrounds. We also aim to do something slightly different, by showcasing some of the richness of current engagements by Indigenous Australians, and others who work with them, in the practice of history.

Histories, identities and ideas about nation are closely intermeshed. The recent adversarial clamour labelled as the 'History Wars', where Aboriginal history topics predominated, but Aboriginal voices were lost, led some historians to defensively retreat

1. Stanner 1968.

2. The Chief Investigators are Frances Peters-Little, Ann McGrath and Margo Neale of the National Museum of Australia. Our research project, which commenced in 2004, has initiated workshops, conferences, exhibitions, journeys, and films in Canberra, the Top End of the Northern Territory, Melbourne, Walgett, Lightning Ridge, Glengarry, Sheepyard, Broome, Kalkaringi, Sydney, Lake Mungo and the Willandra Lakes district.

to conservative formats and source options. This threatens to narrow, or at least contain, the parameters of acceptable 'history'. For example, some recent Australian debates about nation and national values have attempted to reinstall British-centred arrival narratives, for example in the Report of the Review of the National Museum of Australia.³ Nonetheless, it has been difficult to ignore Indigenous history as a founding element of Australian nationhood. The importance of Aboriginal history was finally judged an essential element of the national story in the government-led 2006 History Summit.⁴

'National values' are passed on not only in formal history texts, but also via entertainments, music, film, sport and many other experiences. A nation which seeks to share values in common requires a nation which can look beyond a 'war' about history, evocative of conquest, and can seek to exchange histories according to collaborative models that allow for differences of perspective and opinion. These histories are not restricted to remote, rural or to urban regions, although they may relate to particular lands. For such exchanges to occur, we need to hear the histories being told in diverse formats, concerned with everything from how we tell the stories of early British contact at Port Jackson to how we explain rugby, and how younger generations learn history through hip hop.

As contributor Tony Birch reminds us in this volume, Indigenous people are often depicted as holding to mythology based in a timeless culture existing outside history. To the extent that their history-related practices are seen as a form of history at all, these have been classed as 'oral history'. When collected by academic historians, Aboriginal 'oral histories' have been transformed quickly into 'usable texts'. Albeit of great value in preserving Indigenous voices, and despite concerted attempts to reduce this impact⁵ when spoken words are rendered into written formats, western historians reinforce a type-faced, disembodied frame for history. Such history-collectors thus *heard* much better than they saw, their records missing the multi-sensory nature of Indigenous history telling. But other ways of representing these multiple dimensions exist.

Fitting non-text based forms of historicity within the constraints of an academic, refereed journal presents challenges. Rather than playing the music or screening the film or art, these forms inevitably have to be translated into text or pixels on a small page. However, working constructively within these constraints, we consider that this journal has a strong role to play in holding a mirror to these growing areas in the field, and in charting the directions that they take. When we were commissioning the articles for the volume, we were asked how we would maintain refereeing standards if the contributions were atypical. As there are ever increasing numbers of people critically engaged with opening up the ways of telling and receiving histories, this was never a difficulty.

It is also significant that modes of publication are undergoing rapid transformation as digital and on-line publication capacities expand and become widely available. They have the potential to augment the scope of standard publication formats and to

3. John Carroll et al 2003. For example, see pp 18-19, 22-24.

4. The Australian History Summit, Transcript of Proceedings, 17 August 2006. See also Communique and Background Papers.

5. See for example Donaldson 1979; Muecke et al 1985; Rose 1989.

make publication increasingly flexible and diverse. Digital forms of publication may eventually catch up with the flexibility and diversity required to adequately express Indigenous forms of history. Before the fortieth edition of the journal comes out, we hope to see the journal's records, discussions and explorations of histories carried out not only in their currently flourishing textual forms, but in interactive maps, on-line videos and sound files of song.

In this volume, Kim Mahood's 'Mapping outside the square' project represents understandings of Mulan/Lake Gregory in a multi-layered canvas format that maps people's relationships to place (p 13-28). Land is a 'dynamic repository of hidden histories, a gift to the future in which we are all implicated' (p 10). While she points out the Walmajarri elders' insistence on the 'right people speaking for country', they want their material to be recorded urgently, so will use outside facilitators (p 11). They are keenly aware that their children no longer learn the country 'by travelling through it and absorbing its detail through the repetitions of story and physical encounter' (p 11). Françoise Dussart's reflections on the acrylic art movement at Yuendumu also explore changing artist-audience relationships and conflicting inter-generational priorities. Educational and ceremonial motivations have been redefined over time so that art production is decreasingly about ritual prestige, kin hierarchies or outsider's expectations. Although using contrasting styles and motifs, Torres Strait Islander artist Janice Peacock's work is also concerned with narrating historical continuity, change and identity. While drawing on traditional knowledge, including craft practices and forms, her work explicitly reinterprets and refutes European readings of her culture.

While more recent studies of memory, memorialisation, place, space and monuments have reflected upon different ways of experiencing, performing and recreating history, the written word constantly informs and imbricates all such practices. Penny van Toorn's recent book, *Writing never arrives naked*⁶ considers earlier Aboriginal engagements with texts and writing, reminding us how this subject's neglect may have reinforced the notion of Aboriginal people as primitive, unchanging practitioners of the non-textual. The editors of this volume are not making a claim that text is irrelevant, but rather, we argue that other mediums and formats can complement, inform and extend words on paper. In her article, Maria Nugent advises readers to scrutinise texts anew in order to look and listen to 'the figure of the Aboriginal eye-witness' to history. There is 'much to learn about how Aboriginal people themselves variously engaged with colonial forms of commemoration and with colonial historical narratives' (p 45). While the Aboriginal eye-witness is both evidence and product of colonial historical practices, this figure 'can tell us something about Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal forms of history-making in the colonial period, and the nature of their relationship to each other' (p 45).

Imagining the visions of a range of different witnesses, Tony Birch depicts the authoritative uses of writing. In staging contrasting voices from 'Archive Box No. 4', his 'Testimony' satirises the 'Archive House of the Nation'. The 'Half-Caste Agitator' states: 'I could take up a white man's suit of clothing and a bible, but I prefer the power of writing' (p 31). The 'Duty Constable' concludes: 'If this man continues in his attempts

6. van Toorn 2006.

to use the English language against our generosity then surely it must be taken from him.' History thus becomes another form of coloniser 'benevolence', as we hear from the 'Director of Surveillance Committee':

The future availability of the material contained within the Archive will be restricted to just one person. He will come to us at a time in the future. He will be known as 'the Professional Historian' or 'The Sophisticated One'. 'It will be the duty of the Professional Historian to wage a war, a 'History War', in defence of the defenceless – the Aborigine – who knows nothing of 'history' beyond myths and legends. When 'The Sophisticated One' cometh, praise him. (p 32)

The view that indigenous histories can be held 'hostage' by whites within the academy must continue to be challenged, for, as American author Peter Nabokov wrote, 'Thinking about ... the historical discourses of non-Western societies is too important to be left to historians alone'.⁷ Poet June Perkins also reclaims the western archive as part of an Indigenous space. Like Mahood, she simultaneously envisages an archive of land and performance. In the dancing/fishing rhythms of her poem, she refers to 'Reeling in the sites of her aunties' significances.' In what could be layers of geomorphic time, she evokes how history is sung and painted in galleries, libraries and landscapes:

She danced the revisions of her story
In layers upon layers
Of the red earth
Yellow earth, brown earth and white clay. (p 67)

Visual evidence, including photographs, films and exhibitions, are also deployed in Indigenous story telling and other historical analyses. Sylvia Kleinert's essay sensitively examines the photographic image of the 1940 wedding of Susie Murray and George Patten, featured on this volume's cover. Kleinert discusses how this image can be read in a particular historical context and can be understood in relation to constructions of a metropolitan cultural identity that have been self-produced to reflect the participants' own identity and modern mores. Heather Goodall's article shows how officially-generated photographic images have, over the decades, created an archive that Aboriginal descendents are now recovering and interpreting as a meaningful history about Aboriginal 'mates' and families living in the north-west of New South Wales. Against the backdrop of changing government policies, a highly stimulating essay by Faye Ginsberg and Fred Myers talks about the escalating role of Indigenous artists and filmmakers and the impact they are having on the way Australia's history has been represented through film and television.

In the spirit of contemporary Aboriginal song-writing and performance, articles about Aboriginal hip hop by Tony Mitchell and an interview by Theresa Davis with the Stiff Gins, could not be more musically different. Yet both essays unmistakably share the message that contemporary Aboriginal musicians conscientiously perform their work with the intention of retaining and relaying Aboriginal oral history, language and storytelling through melody and drama.

⁷ Nabokov 2002: vi.

Another popular Indigenous mode of history is autobiography. While this volume cannot explore this major theme fully, Tim Rowse's invigorating essay 'Public occasions, Indigenous selves: three Ngarrindjeri autobiographies' enables us to share in the written/edited and spoken/transcribed/edited modes of Aboriginal historical storytelling through the autobiographies of Doris Kartinyeri, Veronica Brodie and Dulcie Wilson.

It is also appropriate that this volume sees the introduction of an expanded Review section that includes films, exhibitions and other genres beyond the book review. Melinda Hinkson's thoughtful review considers the 'Our Community' photographic exhibition and documentary film staged at the National Museum of Australia as part of the 'Unsettling Histories' project. On the topic of Indigenous filmmaking, Sylvia Lawson's review article looks at the film *Yellow Fella* made by Kamilaroi filmmaker Ivan Sen. On another note, John Docker's review of the film *King Kong* laments the ongoing influence of earlier scientific racism and paranoia concerning black sexuality.

The 'Great Australian Silence' is now a fiction. As Faye Gale and Fred Myers write (p 97):

Beginning in the 1960s, from all parts of Indigenous Australia, urban and remote, people began talking back in the idioms available to them, from traditional bark paintings, to political performances intended for local audiences, as well as national radio, television, and cinema. They have been raiding the colonial archive, using their own creative work to resignify these documents and images that once naturalised ethnocidal projects, while also recuperating Aboriginal history for Indigenous people and all Australians.

Inability to recognise the oral, visual, performative and autobiographical storytelling mode of Indigenous histories, on their own terms, is to deny Indigenous Australians their place in Australia's future. This volume thus reflects wide-ranging historical practices both in and outside the archives, especially those visual, performative and other embodied practices of history- and memory-making by Indigenous Australians.

The co-editors would like to thank the Board of Aboriginal History for supporting the idea of a themed thirtieth edition of the journal. They recognised that this particular theme of 'Exchanging histories' was a highly appropriate one, marking as it does both continuities in the aims of the journal and the developments in the discipline over three decades. We also wish to thank the contributing authors for responding with interest and creativity to the volume's theme. The many referees are thanked for their indispensable contributions, as are Angela Philp for her invaluable editorial assistance, Tikka Wilson for her skilful typesetting, Geoff Hunt for his copy editing of these variously textured papers and Dick Barwick for producing his thirtieth cover for the journal.

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Mapping outside the square: cultural mapping in the south-east Kimberley

Kim Mahood

In June 2005 I carried out a 'cultural mapping' project at the invitation of the Walmajarri Aboriginal owners of Paruku (Lake Gregory) in the south-east Kimberley. The team of white people with their varied expertise who assisted me were geomorphologist Jim Bowler from the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Melbourne, tourism consultant and trainer Petrine McCrohan from Kimberley TAFE, anthropologist Catherine Wohlan from Broome, linguist Eirlys Richards, also from Broome, Mark Ditcham, co-ordinator of the Paruku Indigenous Protected Area, and John Carty, an anthropology doctoral student working for the Palyalatju traditional medicine organisation based at the nearby Balgo community.

The project's intention was to bring together scientific and Aboriginal knowledge of the Lake Gregory area, to record traditional stories and oral histories, to make photographic and video documentation of campsites, archaeological and geological sites, bush food and bush medicine, and to record place and family names. The central template for this recording process was a large painted canvas map, on which were inscribed dreaming tracks, place names, soakwaters and campsites, the precise areas to which people's ancestors held entitlement, and the locations where large groups of people came together during the period of first encounters between white settlers, missionaries and Aboriginal people. The revisiting of locations and camping out on country provided an opportunity for elders to pool their knowledge of names, places and events now at risk of being forgotten, for the purposes of educating their children in their country and their culture. The inclusion of non-Aboriginal information was an incremental shift towards bridging the gap between knowledge systems, and an attempt to provide a basis for future planning of the management of the lake. In the process of the mapping exercise questions were raised about environmental maintenance, the protection of artefacts and the increasing impact of tourism. The map and recorded material were later exhibited at the Balgo Culture Centre, allowing the Walmajarri lake people to present their own culturally coherent identity within the large and diverse mix of language groups based in and around Balgo.

This paper is a reflective piece with no academic pretensions. It attempts rather to evoke the place and its people, describing the sometimes uneasy interface between white and Aboriginal knowledge systems, and leaving open the constantly evolving possibilities of that encounter. As part of the essay I have included the 'storybook' pro-

duced for the Aboriginal participants, to illustrate the gap between written and oral/visual ways of presenting information. Since I am myself a writer and visual artist rather than an academic the gap is not as great as it otherwise might be.

May 2005

Heading west again, towards what feels like home, or the nearest thing to it I have. But always when I arrive there's that small quiver of ambivalence before the familiarity takes over, the pleasure to be back, the daily involvement in the project to hand.

This need to keep covering the same ground, straddling the worlds. And they are worlds that don't make much space for each other, in spite of the fascination, even obsession they have for each other.

This is a story without edges, grounded in the lives of contemporary Aboriginal people but inflected with the preoccupations of a white Australian imagination. It is full of contradictions and loose ends and unfinished stories, its templates formulated in the Dreaming and the Pleistocene. Its narrative is structured around a journey that is circular and repetitive, formed by and giving form to a particular place. The place is real, but it can also be read as a metaphor, the inland lake as palimpsest, engraved with the events of deep time. Its ancient geography can be read through the processes of erosion and sedimentation, and those processes continue to work on the living culture.

On the cusp of the Tanami and Great Sandy Deserts lies a remnant palaeo-lake that goes by many names. On early maps it is called Gregory Salt Sea, named in 1856 by Augustus Gregory, the first white explorer to reach it. The faint poetic echo has since disappeared, and modern topographical maps refer to it simply as Lake Gregory.

To its traditional Walmajarri owners it is known variously as Mulan lake, Paruku, Yampirri Yampirri, Muntakuyungajirta (stomach without meat), and a host of names that describe specific parts of what is in fact a complex system of fresh and brackish lakes. The names mentioned refer to the biggest of the lakes, a body of approximately eighty square kilometres of water. Three hundred thousand years ago it was ten times that size, and the trip I made in June 2005 with a group of traditional owners and an assorted collection of white professionals was a journey through time as well as country.

Some years ago in the melting pot of a ceremonial gathering of Aboriginal women, I had a conversation with another young white woman who, like me, had been thrown by circumstance into the event. She was assisting a scientist in gathering information around Lake Gregory. The scientist was the geomorphologist Jim Bowler, and among his reasons for studying Lake Gregory was its similarities to Lake Mungo.

Like many white Australians with a passion for Australian prehistory, my imagination had been captured by Jim Bowler's discovery of the ancient burial sites at Lake Mungo, and my own associations with Lake Gregory stitched the two places together in a pattern I was not ready to examine, but which did not go away. In the sea change of the following years I returned many times to the Tanami, re-establishing old relationships and forming new ones, and two years ago was invited by the traditional owners

of Lake Gregory to work on a project with the women at Mulan, the Aboriginal community near the lake. Among them was Shirley, the daughter of a man who had worked as head stockman for my family during the years we lived in the Tanami, and in the course of many conversations I spoke of the symmetries and differences between Mulan and Mungo, and what they had to reveal about Aboriginal history and prehistory.

Shirley had never heard of Lake Mungo, and had scant knowledge of the scientific discoveries that continue to reveal the prehistory of Australia, but the idea excited her, and together we formulated a plan, which we put to the community, to invite Jim Bowler back to make a trip with the traditional owners around the lake, revisiting the sites of traditional and scientific significance. We would make a map on which all this information could be written, a document that would record Aboriginal knowledge and white science, pastoral history, mission days and land rights, to see where they intersected and overlapped.

The lake country is a significant arid wetland and an Indigenous Protected Area, the Aboriginal equivalent of a National Park. It has been a cattle station and the site of a landmark return of country to its traditional owners. Stories, like water, accumulate in it. Its current owners grew up in the cattle industry, though the oldest of them were born in the bush. The stories of its creation are told and retold, of the two dingoes who chased two emus down the channels of the Sturt Creek floodout, killed them at the junction of the big lake, and went on into the ground at Pangkupirti Creek, where the salt trails of their sweat are still visible.

From time to time the lake dries up, and occasionally it floods out to something approaching its original dimensions. As a more or less permanent body of water, it is one of the most important arid wetlands in Australia, the lake and its surrounding grasslands supporting many varieties of birds, plants and animals. Since its declaration as an Indigenous Protected Area under the aegis of the Department of Environment and Heritage, the World Wildlife Fund and Territory Parks and Wildlife have assisted the community with field trips to gather information about plants and animals, their traditional uses and significance as well as their scientific identification, in order to plan for long-term environmental management.

Jim Bowler's long association with the lake was for what it could reveal about climate change in the northern part of the continent. Three hundred thousand years ago Australia was much wetter than it is today. Between ten and twenty thousand years ago it was a great deal drier. During that dry phase a number of inland lake systems, including Lake Mungo in NSW and Lake Gregory in the southeast Kimberley, dried up. Lake Mungo never refilled, and so began a process of erosion that eventually revealed the ancient burial sites and pushed back the known period of Aboriginal habitation to forty thousand or more years ago. The Mulan lakes are not eroding, and so have not revealed spectacular ancient grave sites. What they do instead is reveal contemporary Aboriginal life in all its complexity, through the period of first contact, pastoral stations and missions to land rights, environmental issues, mining and tourism.

June 2nd Mulan

Woke up at 3 am feeling completely overwhelmed by what I've taken on – fear of no-one turning up, fear of too many people turning up, fear of not being able to orchestrate anything. And knowing I had to go out there in the morning and appear to know what I was doing. I feel like a dilettante, blundering into projects for which I am equipped only with a kind of laissez-faire optimism that I'll pull it off somehow.

We made our base camp at Yunpu, one of the freshwater lakes on the western side. The water was shallow and aquamarine, the white lake sand rimmed by red dunes that marked an earlier shoreline. Flotillas of pelicans fished the middle of the lake and the women fished the edges. In the afternoon we unrolled the map, a canvas two and a half metres square onto which I had painted a scaled-up version of a topographical map of the lakes. It was naming time, an exercise in collective memory and the expertise of our linguist, who spelled the names for my untutored ear while I crawled about and marked them in chalk under the argumentative guidance of the elder women. From the outset it was clear that the map wasn't big enough. Its squared edges and my notion that such arbitrary boundaries would be adhered to made no sense to people who had walked the lake environs as children and carried their knowledge of country in their bodies. The first overlapping of white and Aboriginal systems of knowledge was an exercise in expediency.

'Puttem', I was told peremptorily, 'you can fixem up later'. I puttem, and the map's edges became congested with information which I would later transfer onto canvas extensions.

June 3rd Yunpu

Sat with Fatima, Minnie, Anna and Frank after dinner – they told stories of old times and dreadful cruelty towards Aboriginal people, grandparents and great grandparents of this mob, horrible stuff, still very fresh – punctuated by great amusement when Minnie remembered some entertaining detail. She's a story teller of little English but great energy and humour. Anna muttering in the background with fastidious distaste.

There's nothing people like better than camping out on country. It doesn't happen often enough, now that most people live in sedentary communities and are limited by the lack of functioning vehicles. Because there was a fairly large contingent of *kartiya* (whitefellows), we were expected to have our own campfire, though it was equally expected that we would wander and socialise at the other fires. The rangers had their own fire some distance away, where they played a constant stream of country music on a portable cd player, and the *kartiya* camp was closely flanked by two fires that served a rough division of family groupings.

Mozzie domes were de rigeur, the pop-up variety that can be erected in seconds, to provide protection from night dangers. There was the usual head-shaking at the *kartiya* habit of solitary swags and tents, and our apparent immunity from wandering spirits. In the night one of the old men was 'choked' by one such being, although next morning he seemed relatively unscathed.

We spent the morning in camp putting on the map the names of ancestors who belonged to specific places, and from whom my informants took direct lineage. One of

them became a falling star, and we traced his trajectory from a mountain in the east to the place where he went into the lake. This was important business, establishing the credentials of the living generations, making memory visible, insurance against the instability of change and the steady loss of oral knowledge. People made decisions about the places they did not want tourists to visit, and the sites sacred to either men or women.

The story of the two dingoes that created the lake has many versions, among them the one given out for general consumption and the restricted version to which only men have access. Jim's white-bearded presence lent our project serious masculine credibility, so when the time came to tell the story the women removed themselves to the lake. It was only the telling that was restricted, the place names and the track of the dingoes was marked in chalk onto the map, though later when I raised the question of whether it could be painted on like the other details I met with uneasiness and no clear answer, so left it as a fragile tracery of chalk.

June 4th Yunpu

Four fires, voices murmuring in the darkness. Light wind and the sound of ducks on the lake. Kartiya all busily flossing their teeth. John said 'It's times like this you feel the cultural gap.'

Have to rescue my shovel from Evelyn, and my blue enamel billy from Fatima, who has designs on it. This morning Evelyn extracted a fat pointed grub from a gall and made me eat it. A burst of juice accompanied by a wriggle, not too bad apart from feeling the point all the way down. Couldn't face the little pink maggot-like grubs in the bush coconut.

We had several agendas for the trip, one of them being to revisit the locations where Jim had taken drilling samples, so we drove to the nearby dunes which Jim's work had identified as the shoreline of approximately 100,000 years ago, the characteristic lunettes formed on the western lake edges by the prevailing winds.¹ He drew a mud map of the lake's evolution, pointing out shell and limestone evidence of recent and ancient floods, and demonstrated how the termites carry ancient shells up from under the ground, where they can be found embedded in the mounds.

The following day we travelled further west, beyond a second dune shoreline laid down approximately 200,000 years ago, its colour a deeper red than the younger dunes, to where the country rose in a broad shallow sweep through a clutter of wattle and grevillea, and the sand grew redder still. This was the great dune of the original lake edge, established between 250 and 300,000 years ago.² At its apex was a grove of old desert oaks, the largest of which Jim had sketched on his original field notes.

'This the Japangarti tree', the old ladies announced, and Charmia wept for the Japangartis who had died. They held Jim's laminated elevational map, which showed the extent of the old lake and the broad palaeo channels that once flowed from it to the western coastline, and awarded Jim the name of Japangarti, brother to the old man tree. Charmia led the women in singing the song for the tree, and then they laid the map down and danced.

1. Bowler, Wyrwoll and Lu 2001.

2. Bowler, Wyrwoll and Lu 2001.

The scientific story of the lake's evolution, with its evidence of ancient shells and shorelines and its one-time connection to the sea, was met with curiosity and interest from the traditional owners, but without surprise. Their own Waljirri tells of a time when barramundi, crocodiles, turtles and other saltwater and estuarine creatures lived in the lake. Jalka the Great Egret took them out of the lake towards the sea, dropping some of them on the way, and leaving only the Spangled Perch and eel-tailed Catfish which live in the lake today.

A few kilometres west we reached Well 50, the last of the desert wells on the Canning before the stock route swings north-east towards the lake and the Sturt Creek channels. The well itself was a limestone trench full of bushes and rubble, with a battered tin baler beside it. The old men walked around patting the fallen timber rails. They had come here as young stockmen, and most had family who had travelled the Canning in the days of droving cattle. Evelyn told the story of her husband, who had walked away from the stock camp at Well Fifty after a fight.

One time when my husband was working on Billiluna cattle station, the stockmen went droving cattle down the Canning Stock Route with Wally Dowling. My husband was a young bloke back then maybe in his teens. When they had left the lake and got to Jikarn (well 50), they camped there. That night a fight started between the stockmen. My husband got upset and walked away from the camp and started making his way back to Billiluna. You know that well, that place called Jikarn with a big hill nearby on the south side, well it was the other side of that hill that the stockmen were camped. There was a tree there they call ngurlunygurluny, that's the Kukatja name for it. It's a scary tree he used to tell me. From there, that tree followed my husband as he walked along by himself. He was frightened. So he climbed up the other trees and slept there in the branches to protect himself from the ngurlunygurluny that was following him.

From there he just kept on walking, walking. When he came to a claypan, he looked around everywhere for the soakwater and he found it. Then he started to dig. As he was digging for water it started to come up through the ground. Then he started to clean the water by scooping it out with his billy can. When it was clean, he drank it. He also brought some sugar, tealeaves and tobacco from the stockcamp so that he would have something to eat and drink along the way.

He kept walking till he came to a bore and rested there. As he was resting, his brother (pamarrngawurr) a spirit person, like a guardian, started to throw little stones at him to let him know he was there. 'I know you, you're my cheeky brother.' Jalyaku said to him.

Pamarrngawurr said, 'Wait till morning and I'll leave you some food as we head off tomorrow.'

So the next morning he ate the food his brother left for him. After he had set off, he found a motorcar track. Then he saw some camel tracks. 'What's this?' he thought. 'I don't know this track.' From there he came to sandhill country and it was hard work climbing them. He got very tired and couldn't go any further. He staggered on until he found some shade and fell down and lay there. While he was lying there, two men found him. They were stockmen who had followed his tracks from Jikarn camp. They saw that he had been staggering as he walked and they were worrying for him. They all rested there, and after recovering, the next day they got up and headed towards the lake. They came to Kurtu Soak near a windmill. From

Kurtu Soak they went east across the lake. Then a priest found them there and offered them a ride in his vehicle. I think it was Father McGuire. He said to them, 'I'll take you to Old Balgo Mission.'³

June 5th Well 50

Retreated to the wattle shade of a claypan to boil the billy, had been there half an hour when a safari of four wheel drives pulled in, tourists from a four wheel drive adventure club on their last leg up the Canning. Spokeswoman for the tourists was a robust lady who showed no fear of transgressing cultural protocols.

'Out for a picnic are you?' she asked. And within minutes, to the women, 'Will you dance for us?'

All the kartiya in the party went rigid. John stayed sitting, head down, blackfellow mode, I reverted to cryptic pastoralist's daughter, Catherine to affronted anthropologist, Petrine to tour guide operator. Jim remained the bemused boffin. Eirlys, our wonderful linguist, was non-committal at being mistaken for the cook.

We felt – what? Offended, protective, trespassed upon. All these things, but I think also we wanted to differentiate ourselves from these outsiders with whom we shared a skin colour. The Aboriginal mob had no such inhibitions.

'Sure,' they said. 'We'll dance for you, if you pay us.'

Anyway, no money changed hands and nobody danced. And to be fair to us, we'd just spent several days in another world, and the arrival of the safari broke into a kind of enchantment. It was the matching cotton sweatshirts that did me in.

Tourism is a contradiction that has to be addressed. Part of our project was to work out practical approaches to developing the lake for tourism, since it offers one of the few viable opportunities for the community. Travellers like the ones we encountered come up the Canning from the south and veer in to the northwest corner of the lake. There's a steady pilfering of artefacts, and the lake people are caught in a bureaucratic bind which forbids their removal to the community for safe-keeping. We took these questions with us to a sand dune jutting out into the lake, a place which after a big wet season is a perfect campsite for swimming and fishing, and from the profusion of artefacts lying about in the sand has been used as such for generations. There was a frenzy of collecting, until Jim's plaintive protests convinced people to put them back where they had found them. There was lively discussion in which people debated the pros and cons of signage, afraid that if the locations were made public it might simply invite thieves.

Driving home, Monica leaned over and dropped a pile of flint chippings in my lap.

³ Story told by Evelyn Clancy at Well 50, recorded and translated 6/6/05 by Eirlys Richards, assisted by May Stundie.

June 6th Comet

After lunch took crew and Bessie, Shirley and Doonday out to Comet (old mission site) to film the site where the dingoes went into the ground. Seems to be no restrictions on doing so. Doonday did the 'Keep going' number across buck spinifex and wattle stakes, but I insisted we take the lesser path along the creek. Got bogged in the sand, not too badly, so we walked from there. Salt trails in the creek indicate the sweat left by the running dogs. Some argument between Bessie and Doonday about the actual location where the dogs went in. They settled on a place where water still lay in a bend, Doonday told the story with Bessie filling in the gaps. My dog became alert and agitated, perhaps sensitive to the presence of the ancestral dogs.

Later when we checked the film it looked wonderful, late afternoon light, the red eroding banks of the creek with the white drifts of salt, and two photogenic elderly people. Unfortunately the sound had not come through. Maybe the dingoes over-rode Doonday's authority to show us the place.

Yutukani pajarranya Parnkupirtila kunyarrkujarrarl
Kurlirra pajarranya yutukani
Yani pajarra wurnala kakarrara
Kanya pajarranyalu Clumpyjarra kunyarru
Kanya-jarranyalu Malarntawu kakarra, yini Malarn
Takurryani pula kunyarrkujarra kinkijartu. Wali

The two dogs put Clumpy and me down at Parnkupirti Creek
They put us down in the south
Then we went eastwards
The dogs took Clumpy and me to a place called Malarn in the east
The two dogs with their bellies full went into the ground there.⁴

June 8th

Circumvented some money and ego problems this morning, re who has elder status, who is offended at being left out etc. Also set up spreadsheet on office computer. Book-keeping and cultural housekeeping.

At Lirra the old men pulled rank, wouldn't let the women accompany them to the ceremonial ground on the point, much to Bessie's disgust — 'We go fishing there all the time!'

Looking south over the lake an old stockman indicated a place where there used to be an island, now covered with water, and told the story of his grandfathers being pursued by *kartiya* with guns after killing two bullocks. The men escaped to the island and were protected by a water snake, which threw up a great wave that pushed the pursuers back and deflected the bullets.

⁴. Story told by Boxer Milner in 'Minya Manpangu Marnu Yapajanka, Stories From Our Childhood', by Mulan Sorytellers KLRC 1999 compiled and translated by Eirlys Richards.

Translator's note: This enigmatic story may need a word of explanation. Boxer and Clumpy are brothers whose country lies around Parnkupirti Creek. They identify with features in the landscape: two rocks which were put down in the Waljirri or Dreamtime. Here Boxer alludes to an episode in the Waljirri story of the two dogs who put the rocks in place. Note that Boxers refers to the rocks as himself and Clumpy. As in all such stories, there are many layers of meaning which Boxer does not attempt to explain here.

And one water snake, *kalpurtu*, you know. He been pushin that water right back! Pushin the *Kartiya* right back in *kankarra*, like sideways. Water been pushin them right back. They been shootin but nothing; half way they been fallin down bullets.

... my one *kilaki* now, he never been come close up to *Kartiya*, wild one, till long time, till last. Till he been come *Kartiya* good ones, all the cheeky ones they bin get away now. They bin shootem my grandfather through the water with rifle, they never get him ... shooting but no they couldn't get him, wasting bullet.⁵

A much-told Waljirri story is that of Jintipirriny, Willy Wagtail, who was overlooked at a ceremonial gift-giving. He went to his cousins, two snakes that live in one of the deep channels feeding into the main lake, and told them of the slight. Angry on his behalf, they travelled west and swallowed all the people, returning to the lake where they vomited up the bones in the place called Kiji, which means bone. In the process of writing it down this story underwent some revisionism at the hands of the Aboriginal assistant linguist, a woman of strong personality, storytelling skills and definite views. A follower of a charismatic Christian religious sect, she added a moral slant to the story.

That's why in our Waljirri people and children today are never to tell lies or to be greedy and selfish and they must always share their things. Otherwise something like this might happen to them.

I was taken with this interpretation, which gave no indication that Willy Wagtail's envy, resentment and desire for revenge, or the mass murder of people by his cousins the snakes was unreasonable.

What became evident as the project developed was that the map was a document that worked on many levels. It was a *kartiya* form of imagining the land, based on technologies that provided a recognisable brand of 'accuracy', but because of its scale, the fact that it was painted on canvas, and because the lake people controlled the information that went onto it and chose the symbols to represent locations and activities, it carried its own cultural legitimacy. The process of collective remembering laid to rest much of the argument around who had legitimate claims to which part of the lake, as each person witnessed the names of their forbears written into the story at the proper location.

The recording and transcribing of stories was of particular importance, the process we evolved consisting of reproducing the story in Aboriginal English and having a literate family member read it back to the storyteller, usually surrounded by a captivated audience.

It was a language rescue operation too, with only a few Walmajarri speakers left in the community, the lingua franca of the region fast becoming Kukatja.

The things that stay with me are the names, like a litany, a mnemonic device taught to children so that they knew where the water was, always the water, soakwater and living water. *Pankupirti*, *Walakarri*, *Ngarrmanu*, *Kakalyalya* (my favourite, meaning cckatoo), *Yirrkaja*, *Liwarrrjartu*. Rhythm, sound, pattern, life, survival.

Bessie named the sites on a painting she had done some years earlier for her daughter, and when she couldn't remember a name she said, 'Gettem that big map'.

⁵ Story told by Frank Clancy at Lirra, 8/6/05, recorded and transcribed by John Carty.

The painting recorded all the soakwaters where water could be found in the dry times, the blue circles placed in the same orientation to one another as the names on the big map. Later, using the same process, we named the locations on a painting of the lake in flood, the painter having died the previous year.

Having so recently visited many of the locations it was a strange privilege to feel the relationship of each place to the other on both map and paintings, to know them physically and to experience one's own vestigial sense of embodied knowledge.

Jun 13th

Drove to Balgo to pick up canvas for extensions on map. On return found May, Bessie, Lulu sitting outside Bessie's house. Realised as I got out of car I had left my handbag at Balgo. Lulu said we needed to call a meeting because people were grumbling about money. I performed a somewhat orchestrated tantrum, that if people thought I would cheat them then I couldn't work for them any more. (Evelyn had conveniently forgotten she had bought a coat and two tins of tobacco.)

They pacified me, 'No Napuru, you right, they shouldn't humbug' etc.

I wasn't really angry, but exasperated enough to put on a good show. My tobacco was in the handbag.

The map is a work in progress, part of a canvas that has no boundaries. From collective memory to individual recollection it's a gathering of stories, a realignment of old alliances, a reopening and laying to rest of old controversies. Often I was hardly aware, among the preoccupations of managing the project, of the hidden politics that were being thrashed out.

It's a cross-cultural document carrying the authority of white knowledge systems overlaid and undercut by the templates of Aboriginal knowledge. Around it hovers the multiple voices of people, released whenever the map is unrolled. It's a moving, storied document that holds something of the noise and scale of a painting, but communicates directly to a white audience as well. Its borders are active, already the people with links north want to make a map of the flood channels of Sturt Creek and beyond.

The link to Mungo that captivated my imagination and that of the *kartiya* to whom I spoke of the project was not significant to the traditional owners of the Mulan lakes. Mungo was far away, in someone else's country. What interested them, endlessly and in all its variety, was their own place, in which the past was transparent and constantly manifest in the present.

Mulan's legacy, as important in its way as Mungo, is more difficult to access because it is through the agency of living people, with their contemporary aspirations and agendas. But for those prepared to pay the respect and attention, to put in the time and manage the contradictions, it's a dynamic repository of hidden histories, a gift to a future in which we are all implicated.

There are two versions of this story, one constructed for a highly literate readership and the other for the people to whom the story belongs, many of whom have little or no literacy. On the following pages is the version created for them. It seems at face value a simple picture book, but like the map it is full of hidden politics. People are located in the places for which they have the right to speak, telling the stories they have

the right to tell. Every image carries multiple meanings, confirming relationships to specific places and triggering a network of associations. People sit down together and flick through it, re-telling the stories and segueing into recitations of family trees that descend from the ancestral names, identifying the places, constantly recapitulating who belongs to which country. An old woman told me, on looking through the book, 'We used to know where the boundaries were. That's how we managed disputes and problems. Everybody knew who had the right to speak for which place.'

Mapping Mulan Big Book document

Drilling auger holes into sand dunes and sifting the sediments of memory can only reveal a partial picture of the ancient geological and cultural topography of the lake country. This is part of its allure, that it will always conceal more than it reveals. On a less romantic level the processes of erasure continue through the depredations of expanding herds of brumbies and poorly-managed cattle grazing. There is evidence that the lake edges and sites rich in artefacts are under threat, the metaphor of the palimpsest taking on a certain environmental urgency.

There is an urgency too among the older Walmajarri people to have things written down, knowing that their children are not learning the country as they did, by travelling through it and absorbing its detail through the repetitions of story and physical encounter. They know that country is still the most important legacy they have, the one resource that might counter the cultural erasure that is occurring through sedentary lifestyles, western popular culture and substance abuse.

The significance that elders attach to the right people speaking for country can't be overstated. What is beginning to emerge through the mapping exercise is a template by which certain essential structures of traditional political life can be represented in an easily accessible form. Whether that knowledge can be transferred in any constructive way to contemporary community life is an open question. The map itself remains a work in progress, and represents in its way my own commitment to finding shared ground that will hold into the future.

Reference

- Bowler, JM, Karl-Heinz Wyrwoll and Yanchou Lu 2001, 'Variations of the northwest Australian summer monsoon over the last 300,000 years: the paleohydrological record of the Gregory (Mulan) Lakes system', *Quaternary International* 83-85: 63-80.

Mapping Mulan 2005

The following pages reproduce at a smaller scale and in black and white a version of the book *Mapping Mulan 2005*. The original is in colour and is A2 in size. It was produced by the Registrar of Aboriginal Corporations, an Australian Government publication. Copyright is held by Kim Mahood and Walmajarri traditional owners of Lake Gregory/Paruku.

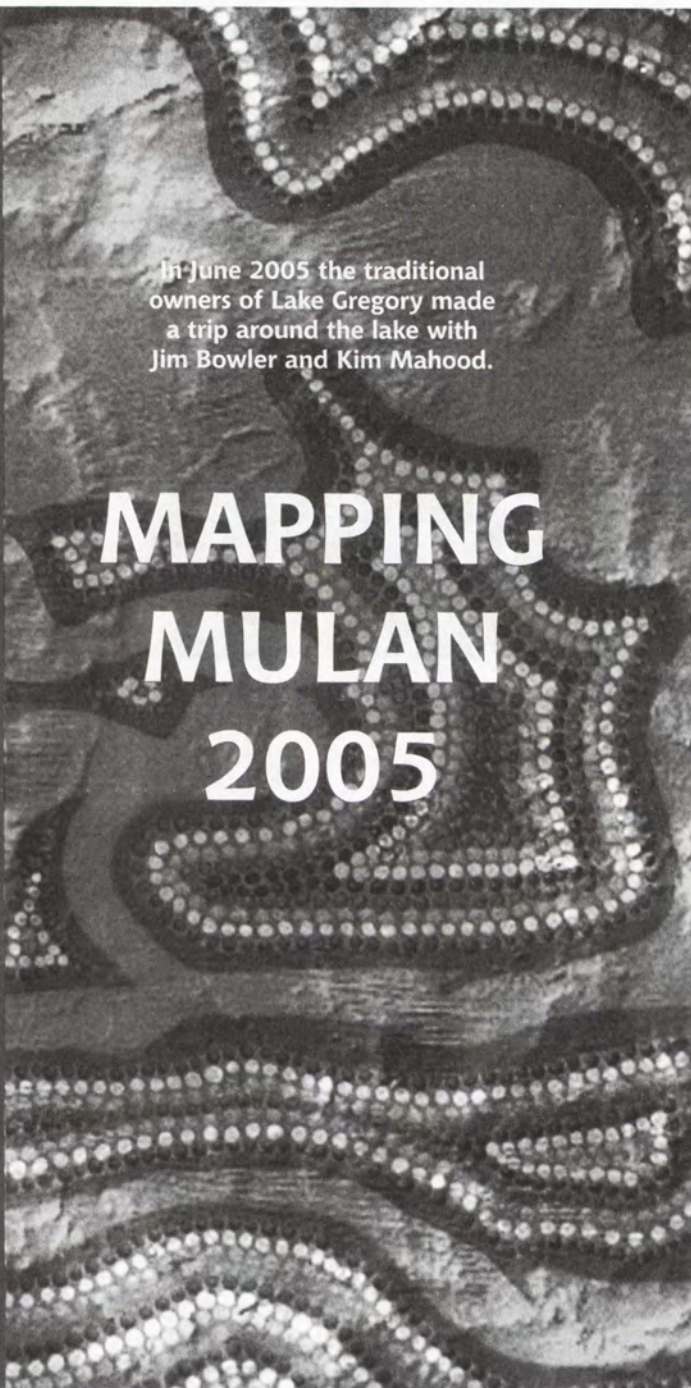
Design is by Lisa Donnelly. Text by Kim Mahood in consultation with May Stundi. Permission to use the book has been given by the Walmajarri traditional owners of Lake Gregory/Paruku.

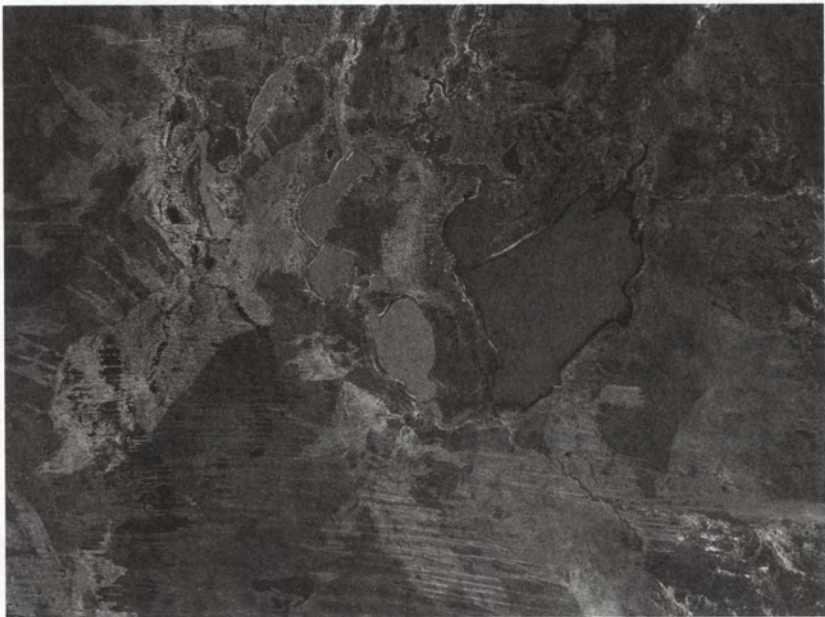
Photographs marked with a circled 'P' are by Petrine McCrohan. The other photographs are by John Carty. They were all taken in the Lake Gregory area in 2005.

KURRTUTU KURRTUTU
JARTA
NGANPAYIJARRA
NGAMAJI
LUPARN
WALAKARRI
PUNGKARLU PUNGKARLU
PARTIJI
KAKALYALYA
JIRRIPARTU
KIRILINYJARTU
WARNKUPARUK
WIRRARARR
LUNGKURRNGAN
YIRRAKAJA
YAMPIIRRI YAMPIIRRI
MUNTAKUYUNGJIRTA
KURNTUKUTA
PANGKUPIRTI
NGARRMANU
KUYURRUYURRU
MATU
PUYI PUYI
LIWARRJARTU
MANYURALI
KILANGKARRA
LUNGKURTA
NYINYINGAN
PINTIRRIJARR
KIRTA
LIRRA
KIRLWA
PIRRNGAN PIRRNGAN
KIJI
LAPALANI
KUMPUJUWAL
LAMANPARAK
LANGAN
JAWAL
WARAWARA
KURTA SOAK
WALYARRA
PULPALY
YUNPU
JALYIRR
KARPIJI
KUTAJARRA
YURRUNYUPARTU
RILYI RILYI
KILANG KILANG
KARNAWA
PARNANY PARNANY
LURRPUNGU
WIRRIINY
JURRULUNGKUJARRA
NYARNAJARRA
MUNTUN

In June 2005 the traditional owners of Lake Gregory made a trip around the lake with Jim Bowler and Kim Mahood.

MAPPING MULAN 2005

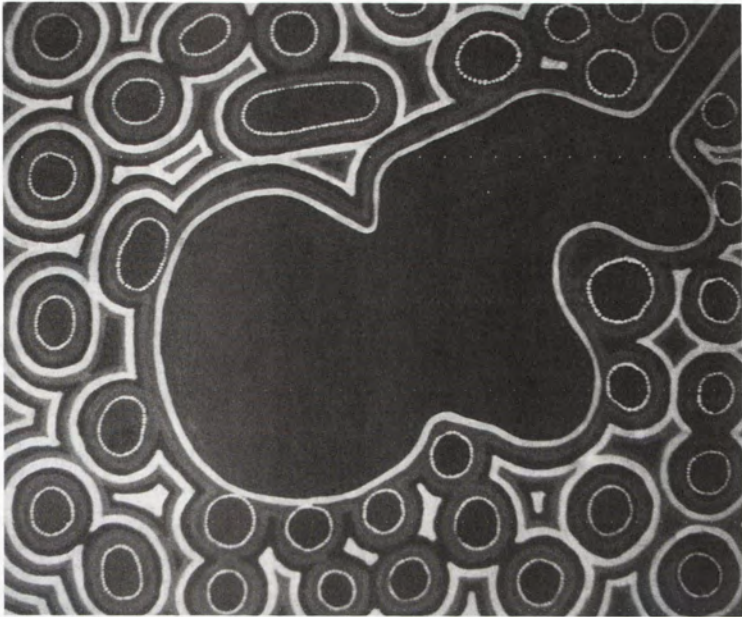




Satellite map of Lake Gregory



Painted map of Paruku/Lake Gregory

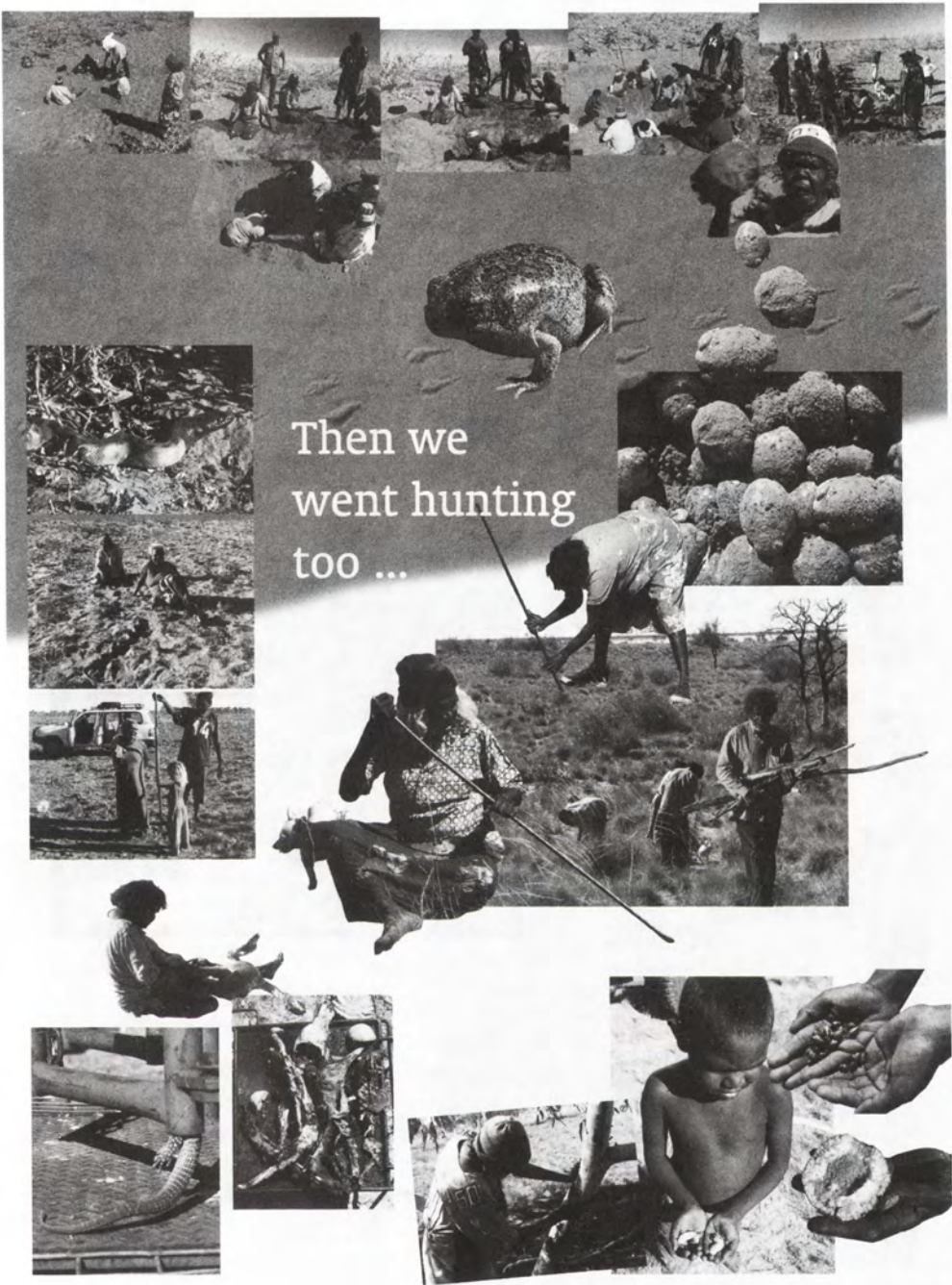


Bessie Doonday, painting of lake soakwaters in dry time



Rex Johns, painting of lake in flood time

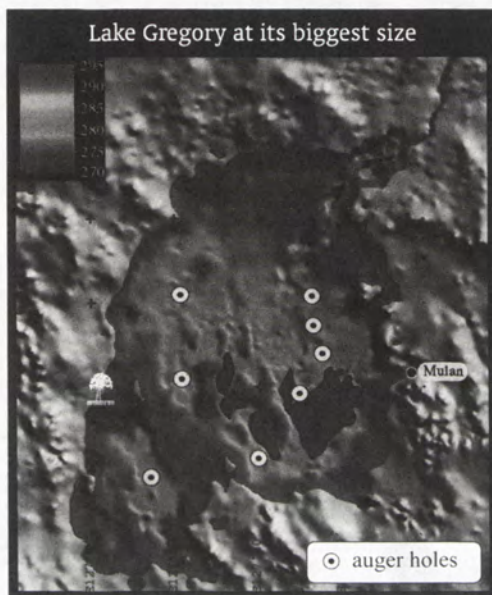




Jim Bowler explained how the sand dunes around the lake were formed.



A long time ago, before people lived here, the monsoon brought much more rain to the country. 250 000 years ago the lake stretched to the big sand dune east of Well 50.



Once the lake was part of a big river that reached the sea. We have a Waljirri story that tells of how there used to be salt water fish and animals in the lake, until Jalka the great egret took them away.

The japangarti tree stands on the big sand dune.



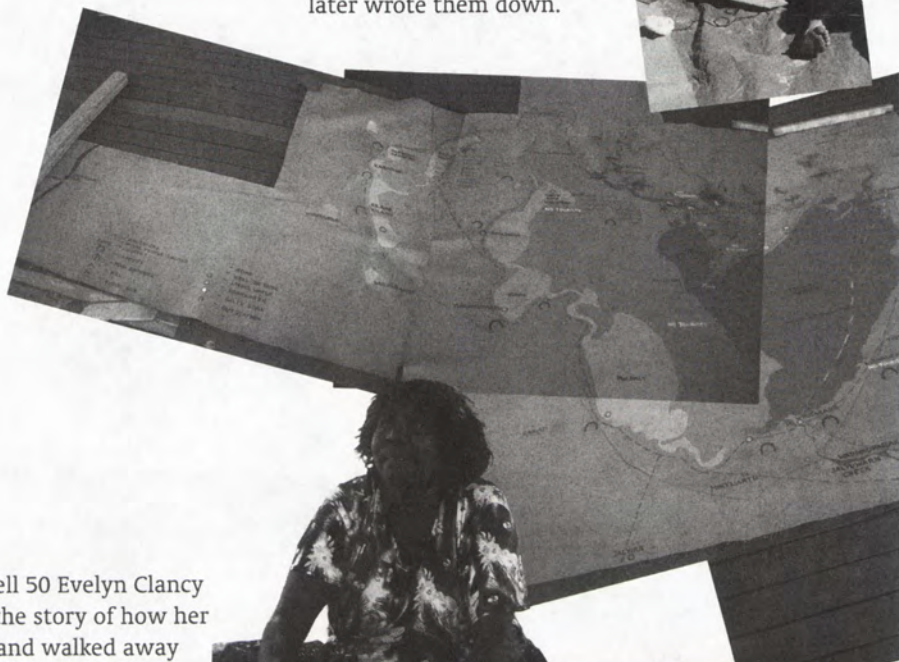
Jim Bowler drilled here and found beach sand from the old lake.



The women danced at the japangarti tree.

At every place we visited,
people told stories of the old days.

We recorded the stories and
later wrote them down.

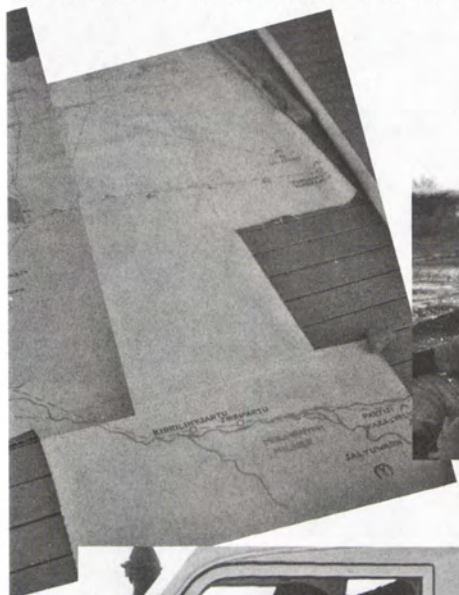


At Well 50 Evelyn Clancy
told the story of how her
husband walked away
from the stock camp.





We talked about how we could look after the artefacts at the old campsites around the lake.



Bill Doonday told the story of Kiki turning into a star and falling into the lake.



Tjilarri Matthews told his story about working as a stockman.

At Jalyuwarn Monica Whisputt told how people ran away from the missionaries and hid in a cave.



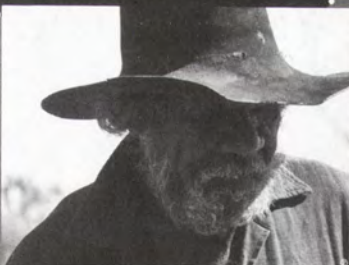
We don't want tourists to
come to this part of the lake.

This is where we like to come to hunt, fish and swim.
There are a lot of sacred places here.

TARUNGKA
NYUMURTU
NGATATA
MIVARRI
MIMANT IYA
PARNANGKA
RANYI
KIMIK
IRRKI
ITI
NGIKA
KIRTA
STS



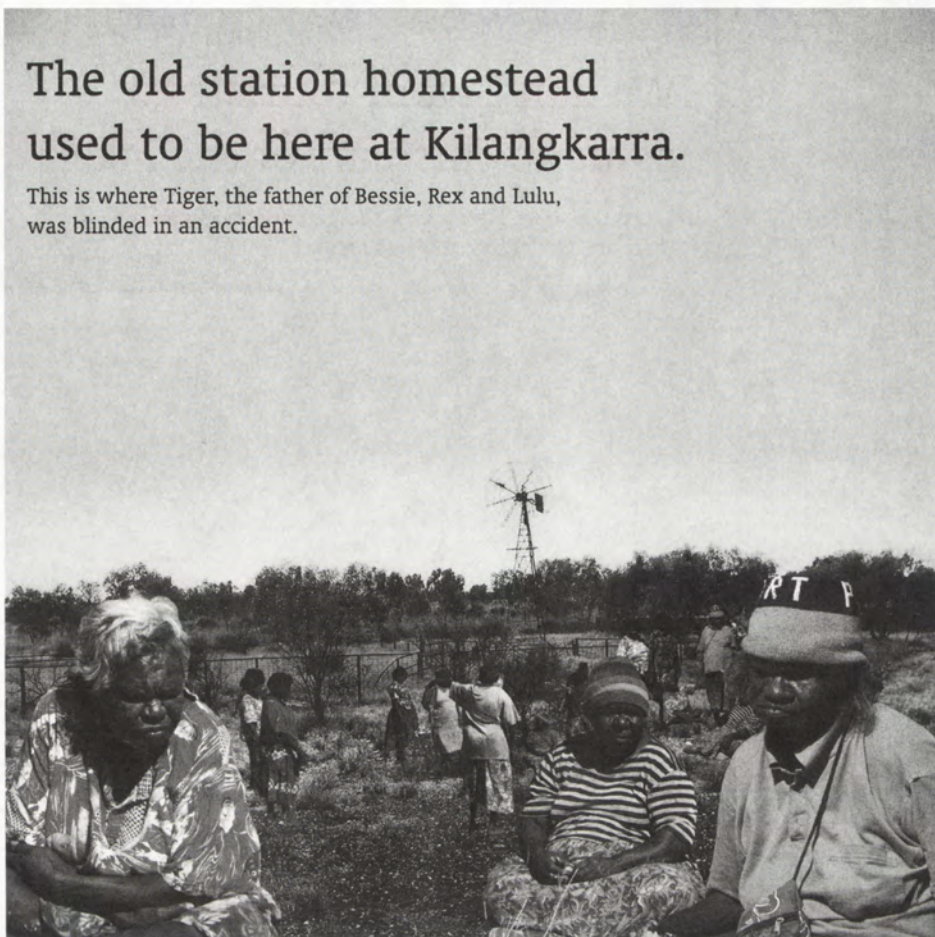
Frank Clancy told the story
of a water snake making a
wave to save people from
kartiya bullets.



YAMBIRD
YA

The old station homestead used to be here at Kilangkarra.

This is where Tiger, the father of Bessie, Rex and Lulu,
was blinded in an accident.



This stone marks the
Blue Tongue site.



The two dingoes who created the lakes went into the ground at Malarn on Pangkupirti Creek. You can still see the salt from their sweat.



The women used to collect the mungily when it dried out and grind the seeds to make damper.

This claypan is an important place for bush food.



We had an exhibition of the map and the story at the Balgo Culture Centre.



The lake has an Aboriginal story and a kartiya story.



The kids danced the story of the falling star.

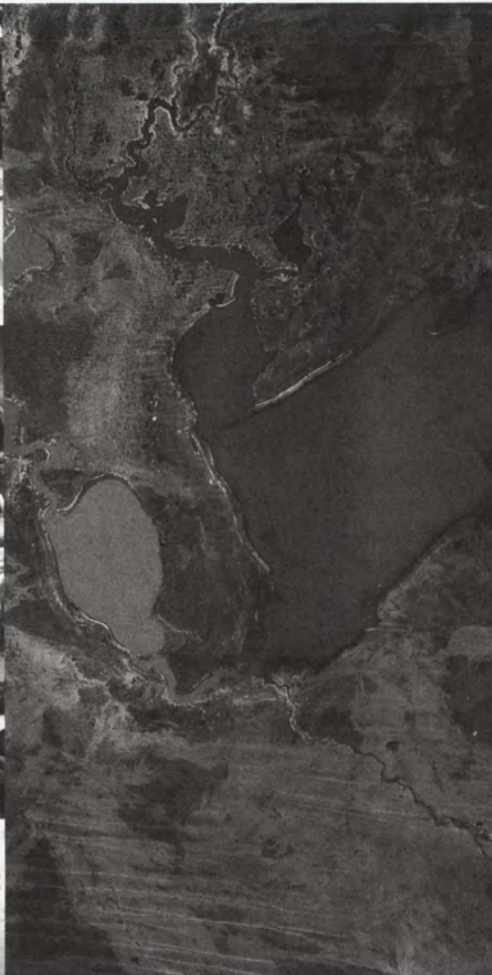


We want our kids to
know both stories.



WORKING TOGETHER

Looking back at our past,
to manage the present
and plan for our future.



Generously supported
by Barbara Blackman



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with this symbol are
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Testimony

(Archive Box No. 4)

Being the final instalment of the archival documentation of White comfort and nationhood reliant upon the historical mythology and invention of 'The Aboriginal Problem'

I. The Local Guardian

I have a duty to report to the Chief Secretary of the inability of a resident from the western district reserve to pay the rent on his wooden cottage. The man has family. He has no work. He is in receipt of assistance — he is also diligent. He is not of the lowest class and demeanour of so many of these people, who are such an irresponsible and worthless category of race that we do not know what it is we will do with them. We do though expect that all who once roamed this land and who have now lost it to conquest must come to realise that they face eventual banishment. Although it is an unfortunate conclusion to reach we feel that even the compliant Aborigine himself (discussed above) must also be banished as he stubbornly refuses to recognise the error of his ways, in that he continues to regard himself as one of them, and at one with them, regardless of the fairness of his hair and lightness of skin that could in time improve both his moral and physical character. (I puzzle, Sir, as to why these light skins do not seek succour and Brotherhood with us. Your wisdom on this matter would be most welcome).

II. The Secretary — Aboriginal Welfare Board

In response to an increasing number of mixed-blood residents demanding some form of recognition as a free people I draw to the attention of all Local Guardians the relevant ordinance(s) in relation to the *Restriction of Movement Act*. In order to be eligible for assistance within the Act adjudication by the relevant authority is determined according to intricate categories of race and colour (a matter on which we have spent many years codifying with due diligence). In order to remove any lingering confusions regarding said categories please allow me clarify. Within the standards contained within the Act race and colour may be mutually dependent. Within the standards of the Act race and colour may be mutually exclusive. Race and colour may be determined — by the size of the skull — by speech pattern — by particular definable traits of the carriage of person — by particular traits of behaviour. Race may be determined by the wink of an eye — a scratch of the left elbow by a Native person. Race may be categorised by suitable displays of deference or *favour*. Race may be determined by a shift in the weather. If in doubt consult relevant scientific data. If this fails to provide evidence regarding individual subjects simply ask the said person if they are in fact Aborigine. The truth will be contained in the *opposite* of whatever they tell you, as they are known to be habitual and cunning liars.

III. The Sub Committee of the Good Ladies Committee of the Aboriginal Welfare Board

We have displayed good kindness to these half-castes. They have during this cold winter past been presented with parcels of our generosity. Carrying the label 'generosity' so as to be sure of our intentions, each parcel was carefully wrapped in brown paper and drawn with coarse string. The parcels themselves did not contain any goods or ration as we feel it best that these children not be spoilt with an act of kindness that has not been pre-determined by their own display of prior effort and an ability and willingness to comply. And yet — despite our kindness, and our clearly stated (and labelled) 'generosity', and our neatly wrapped brown paper parcels, they have refused subsequent orders to work (they did not so much as bow!). The demeanour of these men and women is so universally and extremely insolent that there is so little left to comment on them with the exception that they are 'mischief-makers'. The Secretary of the Sub Committee of The Good Ladies Committee has concluded that where mischief lurks mischief poisons. We will not tolerate the soiling of our land and the name of God due to actions of the lapsed. Therefore, come the winter next, no parcels will be forthcoming until the half-castes oblige us with a suitable display of deference.

IV. The Aboriginal Mother

I am the mother of a soldier who now fights for a country that does not recognise his presence as an Aboriginal man. I am also the wife of a soldier who fell for this country in the Great War. He would eventually spill his blood and lose his life away from the home that has now been taken from us who waited for him to return. I am also the daughter of a woman who beat her feet on this ground and held this earth and told you that which you have refused to hear — that this land is ours. This is our home — traced in her footsteps, and yet my son who wears the uniform of the Empire and carries the bravery medals won by his father at the cost of his own life has been now been told that he has no home here to return to. His uncles are here (also soldiers of the Great War), and are now not permitted to leave here without written permission due to the caste of their skin. His wife is here also, and is not permitted to leave. His children are here and soon will not remember the face of their own father if they are not reunited with him soon. My son faces the dock and the prison cell if he 'trespasses' on his own country. And yet he will return here without doubt, as he loves his family. I love my son dearly and do not wish to see him imprisoned. And yet it will be so according to a word that you call 'law' — but we know to be terror.

V. The Secretary of the Licensing Committee of the Aborigines Welfare Board

The Licensing Committee of the Aborigines Welfare Board have met and discussed the request by the Native woman seeking permission for her Quadroon son to reside on the Native reserve on his return from service with the AIF in New Guinea. The said Quadroon is not a Native as classified under the Act. While he is neither a European of predominantly British stock he is so nearly White that we seek permission from the Chief Secretary to reclassify him as Octroon — which he may not be (biologically defined as such) but is so nearly so in appearance as to be able to 'pass' without undue inquiry or suspicion. As this (at present) Quadroon is so nearly White any return to a Native camp would be of harm to him and the Natives both. Therefore, it is our resolve to charge him with 'trespass' if he does attempt to return to the Native reserve. This has

been adjudged to be of his benefit (although he himself may not fully recognise this). Additionally the Native woman (the mother of the soldier) needs to be dissuaded from writing any further letters of complaint. She is known to be an habitual agitator for Native 'rights' for many decades passing. It is vital that she comes to realise that the Aboriginal Welfare Board while being sympathetic to the Native people of this state will not support the misguided views of this or any other native woman. We must, as Protectors of Aborigines, act in their own interest.

VI. The Half-Caste Agitator

I bring to the attention of the Secretary of the Aboriginal Welfare Board that our ration has recently been reduced to 6/- a week — and in the future, we have been informed, will be paid 'in kind'. But there is no kindness in our imprisonment on this place that we willingly resided on in the past with the view that the land would eventually be ours to control. Our men have no permission to work independently of the slave conditions imposed upon us. The women are unable to leave the reserve to gain employment for themselves. We do not see a strip of meat. We are without boots. Our clothing is rags. All the wood of the forest is cut for the government while our hearth remains empty and cold. We work picking peas yet see no money to purchase a handful of nourishment while the honourable members of the Aboriginal Welfare Board grow fat on our labour and their idleness. If they appear duly satisfied with our situation then let them dine at our table with a bowl of their gruel. If I be punished for my insolence so be it. I am punished already for being dutiful and speaking not at all. I could take up a white man's suit of clothing and a bible, but I prefer the power of writing. I could become obligated but I decline to oblige.

VII. The Duty Constable

We have a man in the district — a free man, of light skin and caste unknown. The man acts with some confusion. Although he claims to be an Aborigine, and descendent of the ancient races previously of this same district, he also demands that he should be treated as an equal alongside the White working man of the land. He also has family here, who are known to illegally house him on the reserve from time to time. He is known to be a great agitator and has become a thorn in the side of the Aboriginal Welfare Board. As a child he was classified as an Aborigine under the Act so that we could rescue him from the old Native habits. He was educated at the schoolhouse on the reserve and at a young age took to the written word and the bible — enterprises praised by the missionary team residing here in times past. He has since taken the pen and used it with violence — demanding cash payment for work, and demanding land for himself and his people. He is of the mistaken opinion (perhaps furnished from a White sympathiser) that his people are entitled to the full respect of the law — a law that we are all fully aware is not their law to partake in. If this man continues in his attempts to use the English language against our generosity then surely it must be taken from him.

VIII. The Director of Surveillance Committee (in relation to 'the Professional Historian')

The Director of the National Surveillance Committee of Natives in consultation with the executive of Aboriginal Welfare and Protection Boards throughout Australia has reached the conclusion that all previously classified Aboriginal families now freed from

the confines of reserves, missions and various secluded enclosures (including prisons, reformatories and remote settlements) who are now at large within the White community will in future be monitored by our officers, supported by confidential monthly written and archived reports containing such information as place of residence, employment, reading material contained in the home, and any gathering with other 'once were' Aborigines (which is strictly forbidden). As this task is a formidable one the eyes and ears of the National Surveillance Committee will be supported by respected members of the community. Therefore we have solicited the assistance of the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker to ensure that all movement of 'once were' Aborigines is diligently documented. Files on each of these people, including medical reports, will be housed within the Archive House of the Nation. The future availability of the material contained within the Archive will be restricted to just one person. He will come to us at a time in the future. He will be known as the Professional Historian — or at times by his nomenclature — 'The Sophisticated One'. (It will easy to identify him. He will be him, and will wear a suit and old school tie, and carry the walk of unquestionable authority and self-assurance). It will be the duty of the Professional Historian to wage a war, a 'History War', in defence of the defenceless — the Aborigine — who knows nothing of 'history' beyond myths and legends. When 'The Sophisticated One' cometh, praise him. And do not ask questions (or request a key to the door!).

'Testimony', being 'archive box no. 4' is the final instalment in a series of works that I have been researching and producing over the last five years. These boxes should be considered as both a creative and political statement in response to the rhetoric of authority that is often constructed around empirical history; a genre that too often disguises its own subjectivity and ideological motivation behind something that, while referring to itself as the truth, denies the truths contained in any competing narratives. I have also been motivated to respond to the travelling 'History Wars' circus, which has done more to stifle the voices of Aboriginal people in recent times than a boatload of imperial warlords armed with gunpowder and a compass.

Tony Birch

Historical encounters: Aboriginal testimony and colonial forms of commemoration

Maria Nugent

The figure of the Aboriginal eyewitness appears from time to time in accounts about Captain Cook at Botany Bay, and in discussions of how the history of Captain Cook at Botany Bay has been publicly remembered and represented. In each appearance, the eyewitness is deployed to contribute to some historical or memorial project. The evidence provided, apparently, by a named or unnamed Indigenous 'eyewitness' is called forth by colonial and post-colonial historians, writers, politicians, remembrancers and others. They do so to authenticate the location of a monument, to provide the 'other' side of the story of an historical event, to settle a controversy over the interpretation of the past in the present, or to make a critical point about the value or otherwise of Aboriginal knowledge in Australian history and memory.

In this paper, I follow the fortunes of some Aboriginal eyewitnesses at Botany Bay as they intermittently appear in the archive in order to raise questions about their changing uses and meanings in nineteenth and twentieth century forms and practices of history-making. Tracking these Aboriginal figures provides an avenue into a broader project aimed at gaining an understanding of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people's forms of history-making in the post-1770 period and the integral relationship between the two. In this respect, I am especially interested in what happens to the figure of the Aboriginal eyewitness as it is 'exchanged' between different contexts of social memory.

Enter the 'blackfellow, hoary with age'

Chris Healy, in his study of social memory of Captain Cook, tells his readers that the location for a brass plaque at Botany Bay, commemorating Cook's and Banks' sojourn there, erected by the Philosophical Society of Australasia in 1822, might have been determined with the aid of information provided by an old local Aboriginal man who had witnessed the past that is memorialised. Wondering how the men of the Philosophical Society knew that the '*this spot*' referred to on their plaque was '*the spot*' that had once seen Cook and Banks 'in the pursuit of knowledge', Healy points to a clue contained in a speech made by Sir Joseph Carruthers in 1899, decades after the plaque's installation, which noted that:

There can be no reasonable doubt that this is the actual scene of Cook's landing, for we have the testimony of two old and respected colonists — Mr Alexander Berry and Dr Douglas [sic] — that in the early part of the century a blackfellow,

hoary with age, who had actually witnessed the landing, identified to them this spot as the landing place.¹

Sir Joseph Carruthers made his reference to the 'black fellow, hoary with age', who had apparently witnessed the arrival of Captain Cook, in a speech that he gave in 1899 at the ceremony to mark the dedication of 'Captain Cook's landing place' as a public reserve.² For this titbit, Carruthers was drawing on an earlier speech, made at the same place, 35 years earlier. In 1863, Dr Douglass, one of the original members of the Philosophical Society, attended a reunion at Kurnell to honour Captain Cook. He explained to his small audience that a member of the Society, Sir Thomas Brisbane, had suggested 'the desirability of ascertaining the precise spot where Captain Cook landed, and directed that inquiries should be made amongst the natives of Botany Bay, if any of them saw the great captain arrive'.³ 'At length', according to Dr Douglass' recollection, 'an old black man was found whose hair was white from age, who said he had seen the big ship come in and the boats land, and could show the precise spot [where Cook landed]'.⁴

Thus by the time Healy uncovers it in his researches, and incorporates it into his discussion of the 'white' social memory of Captain Cook, the reference to the 'blackfellow, hoary with age', is already many decades old, and second, if not third, hand. Chris Healy joined a conversation that had been in train for some time, at least intermittently. By picking up this particular thread of the conversation, and weaving it into his late twentieth-century critical study of social memory about Captain Cook, Healy introduced to a new audience this little-known aspect of the inscription plate's story. Perhaps more importantly, he enacted yet another exchange whereby this 'trace' of Aboriginal testimony about the deeds of 'white' men entered a new context of public memory, in which its meaning was interpreted anew.

For Healy, the value of this particular 'trace' was that it 'hints at the links between European social memory and indigenous knowledge'.⁵ His discussion of the archival fragment suggests that the link between European social memory and Indigenous knowledge is weighted heavily in favour of the former. He makes the searing observation that the Philosophical Society's inscription plate, while (apparently) dependent upon local Indigenous knowledge, made no reference at all to the presence of Indigenous people, before, during or after the arrival of Captain Cook. 'What makes this story tragic', Healy writes, 'is the simultaneous use of Aboriginal knowledge and disavowal of Aboriginal presence'. He continues:

The memories of an Aboriginal eyewitness were used by the Philosophical Society to memorialise a European discovery which they claimed as initiating history on a silent continent. Imagine the other conversations which could have taken place in relation to those rocks on Botany Bay. It seems that Mr Berry and Dr Douglas [sic] refused an opportunity for dialogue and a chance of translating social memory between cultures. Instead they cast deft and vital memory as brass dogma.⁶

1. Cited in Healy 1997: 22. For the original speech, see Carruthers 1899.

2. Carruthers 1899: 34-35.

3. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1863, cited in Bertie 1924: 242.

4. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1863, cited in Bertie 1924: 242.

5. Healy 1997: 22.

This is a damning indictment of the members of the Philosophical Society in terms of their treatment of the local Aboriginal man's 'deft and vital memory', and of their failure to produce social memory or history of a different kind, a more dialogical kind than their monumental approach appears to have allowed.

Healy is certainly not alone in identifying and bemoaning the ways in which colonial monuments, and the monumental forms of history out of which they emerge, have served to block from view Aboriginal presence in place, before and after colonisation.⁷ There is little doubt that colonial monuments have made heroes out of 'voyagers', 'founders' and 'pioneers', and through them perpetuated myths about the origins of the white nation or how the country was 'settled', eclipsing in the process the 'other side of the story'. This is clearly reflected in the inscription on the brass plaque on the cliff face at Botany Bay, which names Cook and Banks as discoverers of these shores; puts them in company with heroes from other times ('the Columbus and Mæcenus of their time'); and is silent on the matter of who was in possession of 'this spot' when they arrived.

In his critical treatment of this tantalising trace of an Aboriginal man's testimony, which had been sought out in the context of public commemoration of the European past in Australia, Healy suggests that the ultimate realisation of the memorial project, which occurred when the inscription plate was finally hammered into the cliff face at Point Sutherland in March 1822, usurped the ephemeral exchange that had reportedly taken place between the local blackfellow and members of the Philosophical Society. Moreover, the very fact of the plaque's presence, with its honouring of the other's history, Healy argues, constitutes a denial of Aboriginal presence in the place, both past and present.

But is this necessarily so? Does this physical form of historical remembrance completely overshadow histories of Aboriginal presence in the place? Does it block from view instances of other, more ephemeral forms of exchanges between blacks and whites in the context of historical remembrance? I am interested in conceptualising the relationship between the colonial monument and the reported testimony of a local Aboriginal man in a slightly different way. Klaus Neumann⁸ makes a distinction between approaches in critical memory studies that 'read' the physical form of a monument as though it were a 'text' and those that focus instead, or additionally, on what he calls 'contexts of public memory', both past and present. His study is a series of detailed investigations into local memorial projects addressing the Nazi past in Germany. In his careful examination of a wide range of physical and public memorial sites, Neumann is 'particularly concerned with the discursive contexts that are not apparent to the passing visitor'. These 'discursive contexts' constitute the local memorial's own history, which are usually not obviously reflected in its form. 'Some of these histories', notes Neumann, 'are complex and contradictory. They often stretch over many years, but rarely leave easily discernible traces.'⁹ They are aspects of a memorial most easily forgotten or overlooked.

6. Healy 1997: 23.

7. See for instance, Griffiths 1987: 22; Bulbeck 1991; Scates and Frances 1989.

8. Neumann 2000: Introduction.

9. Neumann 2000: 2.

Although what is said on the plaque might speak loudly of silences and absences, or myths and lies, that is not the only story to be extracted from local edifices. If they are able to be satisfactorily reconstructed from archival and other sources, the 'hidden histories' of local memorials, Neumann argues, could be made to 'reflect and thus shed light on broader developments' in the nature and the politics of the remembrance and representation of particular pasts.¹⁰

Taking this approach in relation to the inscription plate on the cliff face at Botany Bay, and indeed to some other memorials that dot the local landscape, what if anything can the history of the memorial, rather than the history told *on* the memorial, tell us? What, for instance, can it tell us about Aboriginal presence in place, Aboriginal knowledge of past events, the use and abuse of that knowledge for colonial forms of historical remembrance, the nature of the link between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history-making, and the nature of public memory more generally in nineteenth and twentieth century Australia? What might turn up if this particular exchange and others like it were examined in ways that go beyond what can be discerned from the memorial's tangible form? This is worth considering because it might be argued that concentrating one's analysis of the fragmentary evidence of Aboriginal testimony at the point at which the colonists' memorial project is realised — etched on brass or carved in stone to become a permanent sign on the landscape — contributes itself to obfuscating histories of Aboriginal presence, or of Aboriginal people's engagement with colonial commemoration and forms of history. By ending the story there, the old blackfella eyewitness remains forever hidden behind the engraved brass plate.

A close examination of the history of the story of the old blackfellow who supposedly contributed to the selection of the site for the inscription plate at Botany Bay in 1822 can tell us something about the shifting credence given not only to Aboriginal people's testimony, but also to what is often referred to as 'local knowledge', as sources for history and in efforts to settle disputed historical details. Whereas in the nineteenth century, this form of testimony was valued, by the early twentieth century its import was questioned by a new type of historian.

This can be seen most clearly in respect to the scrutiny given to the (supposed) testimony of the 'blackfellow, hoary with age' by the historian Charles H Bertie in the 1920s. By the time Bertie turns his attention to the history of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, the practice of history in Australia was becoming increasingly professionalised, and it was reflecting the developments in the discipline that had been taking place in England and Europe.¹¹ As MacIntyre and Thomas note, in the nineteenth century the discipline of history 'underwent a scientific renovation in English universities. The discipline was effectively rebuilt around the systematic and technically rigorous examination of the documentary record'.¹² This model found its way to Australia, and was practised by a new class of historians in the opening decades of the twentieth century. In this context, old references to Aboriginal eyewitnesses to historic events were

10. Neumann 2000: 4.

11. See MacIntyre and Thomas 1995.

12. MacIntyre and Thomas 1995: 2.

subjected to critique. In some quarters, these old and oral forms of historical remembrance were considered anathema to a new professional, positivist history. This is the tenor of Bertie's discussion of the reference to an 'Aboriginal eyewitness' to Captain Cook.

In April 1924, on the 154th anniversary of Captain Cook's landing at Botany Bay, Charles H Bertie challenged the veracity of both Dr Douglass' 1863 reference to the old blackfellow, and Joseph Carruthers' 1899 public recitation of Douglass' recollection. Bertie did so in an address he gave to the Royal Australian Historical Society, which was published the same year.¹³ Bertie questioned Douglass' and Carruthers' respective truthfulness, in part on the basis that he could find no reference to the old Aboriginal man in the relevant records (then newly discovered) of the Philosophical Society of Australasia, and in part on what he perceived as inaccuracies in Douglass' account.¹⁴

In his discussion, Bertie implied that the old blackfellow had been introduced into the story of the inscription plate only when Dr Douglass mentioned him 40 years after the event. From this time onwards, the 'old black man' had, in Bertie's view, become an erroneous element in the memorial's history. Bertie's personal quest was to correct this elaboration in the story of the plaque, which he identified as the product of Douglass' faulty memory, primarily because it had contributed to confusion about the *exact* point where Cook had first stepped ashore. The memory had messed up the history.

Indeed, the whole tenor of Bertie's paper was to rectify discrepancies which had crept into the histories told about Captain Cook at Botany Bay. 'It is my purpose in this paper', he wrote, 'to deal solely with the *Endeavour's* sojourn in Botany Bay, and to attempt to solve some of the questions which have arisen from that sojourn'.¹⁵ His project involved an attempt to sift what he deemed mistaken recollection from documented fact. In his quite lengthy study, in which he garners a diverse range of sources, including fragments of recollection from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, many of which he introduces in order to dismiss, Bertie attempts to peel away the accretions of 'local knowledge' which he believed had been responsible for introducing errors in the history of Captain Cook at Botany Bay. For this reason, his study provides a fascinating example of a mode of history, belonging to the early part of the twentieth century, which traverses the terrain between the increasingly valued 'positivist' approach to the writing of history, and more popular understandings of the past that typically owed much to claims of direct and personal knowledge about, or connection to, historical people, events and places.¹⁶

13. Bertie 1924.

14. Minute book, 1821-1822, Philosophical Society of Australasia, Mitchell Library, FM3/99. It is certainly true that, in the various discussions of the brass plate recorded in the minutes of the Society, there is no mention of the 'black fellow'. Yet, this does not completely discount the possibility that some members of the Society went looking for and consulted with a local Aboriginal man. Rather, what this absence in the records tells us is that had some members of the Society undertaken such a quest, it was not included in the minutes of the Society's weekly meetings, held on Wednesday evenings in the respective houses of its members.

15. Bertie 1924: 234.

16. For a discussion of this shift in Australian history, see Thomas and MacIntyre 1995. For a discussion about how 'history' is interpreted as an enemy of 'memory', see Nora 1989.

The publication of Bertie's 1924 treatise immediately generated another round of commentary and contestation about Captain Cook's history at Botany Bay, from Mr Carruthers and others. Once again, local knowledge and personal memories, including those of local Aboriginal people, were brought into the argument.¹⁷ For instance, in challenging one of Bertie's several claims based on a close reading of Cook's charts and journals, Carruthers' counters with some information that 'the old blacks of the neighbourhood (Billy Rowley and his mother being the oldest of our informants) told us'.¹⁸ Carruthers' overriding criticism of Bertie's historical method was that he lacked familiarity with the locality, which limited the extent to which he could accurately interpret the relevant documentary sources. Unlike Carruthers, he did not have access to local Aboriginal 'informants', who possessed intimate knowledge of the local landscape acquired over many years, and who had supposedly inherited knowledge from ancestors who had claimed to be there when Captain Cook came ashore. Without this local information, Carruthers implied, the historical knowledge to be gained from available documentary records, in this case Cook's charts and journals, would at best be inadequate, at worst in error.

In this respect, these debates about the history of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, played out in the pages of the journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society during the early part of the twentieth century, and commonly revolving around some piece of Aboriginal testimony, were as much a tussle over which types of historical evidence had credibility as they were about what actually happened in the past. In the 1920s, a debate about the value of Aboriginal (and indeed non-Aboriginal) oral testimony as historical source had begun, but it was not yet over, although Bertie's piece does mark a shift whereby local Aboriginal knowledge about historical events appears to begin to lose some of its standing, particularly among professional historians. This process unfolds in the opening decades of the twentieth century when the 'veil of silence' in Australian history about relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people descends, before Aboriginal people's memories begin to regain some cachet with the rise of oral history recording from the late 1960s onwards.¹⁹

This general trend was evident in other forms of historical commemoration staged at Botany Bay. For instance, when the annual anniversary of Captain Cook's landing was faithfully commemorated each year at the spot, organised by the Trustees of Captain Cook's Landing Place Reserve, few references, if any, were made to Aboriginal people generally. More notably, neither were there references to the possible links between Aboriginal people then visibly living in the local area and those who had been there when Cook sailed through the heads.²⁰ This was despite the fact that local Abo-

17. For a discussion of 'local knowledge' and historical memory, see Roberts 1995 and Schlunke 2005.

18. Carruthers 1925: 35.

19. See Stanner 1969: 18-29.

20. For copies of the programs for the annual commemoration of the landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, see Captain Cook's Landing Place Trust archives, Botany Bay National Park, Kurnell. The standard program included: the arrival of the official party by ferry, an inspection of a naval contingent, inspection of the Cook monument and landing rock, naval cadets marching to the flagstaff, speeches, breaking of the flag, firing of a salute, and planting of memorial trees.

iginal people themselves from time to time publicly claimed a direct connection to the Indigenous people who were on the beach when Captain Cook arrived.²¹ The public evocation of a vital link between a remaining Aboriginal presence at Botany Bay and the time of Captain Cook's sojourn, which had been an element in colonial forms of commemoration in the nineteenth century, had by the middle part of the twentieth century become a thing of the past. Indeed, it seems that a divide had been erected between local Aboriginal forms of historical remembrance and what Chris Healy has called European social memory.

The schema that I have sketched by tracking the various references to, and arguments about, the local Aboriginal man who had reportedly assisted with the commemoration of Captain Cook and Banks in 1822 can be complemented and elaborated by reference to at least three more Aboriginal 'eyewitnesses' evoked in relation to other monument projects at Botany Bay across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An examination of the local histories of these three additional monuments contributes to the composition of a more textured picture of the uses of local Aboriginal people's historical testimony in the context of colonial commemoration. It reinforces the contours, already sketched, of the changing uses and meanings of Aboriginal testimony about historical events, particularly as they are deployed, or indeed dismissed, in new contexts of public memory and history. But, at the same time, these local histories of monuments provide glimpses of, and raise questions about, Aboriginal people's own uses of settler commemorative projects. Most importantly, it demonstrates the ways in which, by the middle of the twentieth century, when Aboriginal testimony is rarely sought in the effort to inscribe in permanent form colonial histories on the landscape, Aboriginal people use colonial commemorations as occasions to stake their own historical claim to place.

Two of the three additional public memorial projects discussed in this section are the marking of the burial sites of two white men who had died at Botany Bay while on voyages of 'discovery'. The first was a seaman (Forby Sutherland) on Captain Cook's expedition in 1770; the second a priest and naturalist (Pere Receveur) on Lapérouse's

21. See, for instance, Long 1935: 13, for an account of story about Captain Cook's landing by a man known as Old Jimmy, told to Long at La Parouse on Botany Bay in the late nineteenth century; Cooper 1909: 1, for an account by members of the Timbery family living at La Perouse on Botany Bay of 'the story of their ancestors witnessing Captain Cook's "Endeavour" making the coast under full sail at Botany Heads'; Interview, Gladys Ardler, NSW Bicentennial Oral History Project, National Library of Australia, 1987, ORAL TRC 2310 INT 71, in which she states that her mother's grandmother would 'tell us how they was on the beach at Kurnell on the ridge and Captain Cook came in and landed and they shot a couple of them on the ridge'. For a discussion of these and other references, see Nugent 2005. It is worth noting that some of the foundational members of the Captain Cook's Landing Place Trust were, in the early part of the twentieth century, interested in local Aboriginal accounts of Captain Cook's history, but it seems that this interest waned over time. See for instance, 'Notes of an interview between W. Houston Esq., one of the Trustees of Capt. Cook's Landing Place (Kurnell) and Mr — Longfield, at Kurnell on Sunday, the 22nd January 1905', Box 12, Item 141, Captain Cook's Landing Place Trust archives, Botany Bay National Park, Kurnell, which relates that an Aboriginal woman had learned from her uncle 'about the landing of Capt. Cook'.

expedition in 1788. The history of the respective origins of these two monuments spans a 100-year period: the memorial to the priest was first added to the landscape in 1824 (and replaced with an even sturdier structure five or so years later); the monument to Sutherland was first mooted in the 1920s and was finally realised in 1933. The third monument in this series marks another place where a British sailor first landed. It commemorates Captain Phillip's 'first' landing at Botany Bay in 1788; and was first proposed in 1950 before being finally unveiled in 1956.

Enter Cruwee

When the crew of *Coquille*, a French ship visiting Sydney in 1824, made a pilgrimage to Botany Bay to pay homage to Lapérouse's expedition, which had mysteriously disappeared after leaving the bay in 1788, they were keen to locate the burial place of a priest and naturalist, Pere Receveur. He had died and been buried on the north head of Botany Bay in February 1788, but his burial place had not been permanently marked.²² The men of the *Coquille* wished to mark its location on the landscape, which they did by engraving a nearby tree stump.²³

To realise their commemorative project, the French pilgrims depended on 'local knowledge', because it was not clear from the extant records where the priest's remains lay. In ways that are very similar to the purported eyewitness account that had apparently contributed to the siting of the inscription plate to Cook and Banks on the opposite headland, a correspondent in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Obed West, publicly claimed, decades after the French sailors' visit, that they had depended on information supplied by a local Aboriginal man named Cruwee for identification of the exact location of the burial site.²⁴ After making inquiries about the tree stump engraved by the French sailors, West reported that he had been informed:

that a person named Richards took the party of French officers to the spot, and then got a blackfellow called Cruwee to point out the spot where the men [*sic*] of La Perouse's ships who died were buried. Cruwee pointed out the spot and it was [on] his information that the tree was marked so that the site should not be lost.²⁵

Yet this account does not tally with the account in the expedition's journal published in the wake of their pilgrimage. That original account names as their guide a 'soldier who had been for a long time stationed at the spot', and it made no reference to the services of a local Aboriginal man in their quest for the burial site.²⁶ The local Aboriginal man, Cruwee, had, it seems, been added to the story of the monument many years after its inauguration. Cruwee's appearance in later storytelling about the monument mirrors, in this respect, the introduction of the 'old blackfellow, hoary with age' in the story of the inscription plate.

²² For First Fleet references to the death and burial site, see White 1962: 126; *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay* 1970: 87; Tench 1996: 61–2; Collins 1974: 16.

²³ See Selkirk 1918 and Nugent 2005. For the original published journal of the expedition, see Lesson 1838.

²⁴ West 1882: 31.

²⁵ West 1882: 31.

²⁶ Selkirk 1918: 349.

Is it a mere coincidence that by the second half of the nineteenth century, a local Aboriginal person, cast in the role of possessor of knowledge about the location of a past event, is later added to the respective stories of monuments originally erected in the 1820s? If not a coincidence, what had made it necessary, or desirable, a generation or so later to introduce a local Aboriginal person as a source of information about the commemorated historical events? It should be noted that these events involved voyagers, predated British settlement, and therefore had not been 'witnessed' by other Europeans apart from those on the expeditions themselves.

In both of these cases, the knowledge purportedly provided by an Aboriginal man was 'locational': they were the sources for knowledge about *where* precisely some event in the past had happened, including where someone had stepped ashore from a boat or where someone had been buried. They were not sources for *what* had happened, or for what they believed had happened. In this respect, Aboriginal testimony was being mobilised for a particularly popular form of history-making in the late nineteenth century, in which identifying where something happened precisely mattered. The concern was to meld history and geography, to map the first onto the second.

In this respect, the incorporation of local Aboriginal people into the stories told subsequently about colonial monuments belonging to an earlier generation might best be interpreted as part of the process by which the significance of old monuments is remade, or reactivated, within a new context of public memory, a generation or so after its inauguration. The figure of the Aboriginal eyewitness is introduced to help authenticate the historical veracity of a monument, and to reinforce its historical significance. The new stories told about the monuments reverse the process by which they might become obsolete, or increasingly obscure.

It is worth noting that the appeal to Aboriginal people's local knowledge to help with the project of fixing the European past in place occurs in a period marked by a belief in, and to some extent resignation about, the inevitable passing of Aboriginal people, and with them the knowledge they held. Some antiquarians of the period, as Tom Griffiths and Denis Byrne have noted, were primarily concerned with preserving knowledge about 'traditional' indigenous practices and society, although they did not always draw on living Aboriginal people as a source for this, preferring instead to accumulate evidence for 'old ways' through the collection of pre-contact material culture.²⁷ But in the case of memorialisation of the European presence in the continent, the knowledge that Aboriginal people supposedly possessed, and which late nineteenth-century monumental and antiquarian historians most valued, was not about Aboriginal people themselves, but about earlier Europeans, who the antiquarian historians understood as being their forefathers. Aboriginal people's knowledge was required in order for the colonists to preserve their own past.

But was it also the case that Aboriginal people themselves had taken on the mantle of the keeper of local knowledge about the early European past in the continent? Had this become a part of the ways in which they marked and claimed a relationship to what was now a colonised landscape?

²⁷ Byrne 1996; Griffiths 1996.

Enter Sally Mettymong

A reliance on local Aboriginal people's knowledge for identification in the present of the exact location of something from the past appears to have continued in the early part of the twentieth century. In disputes over the precise location of where someone was buried, or where something of historical import had happened, Aboriginal testimony was added to the range of sources that were consulted in a bid to clear up the matter, as was evident in the contours of the debate between Bertie and Carruthers discussed earlier. When, in the early 1920s, the Royal Australian Historical Society decided to erect a monument to Forby Sutherland, a seaman from Captain Cook's voyage who died and was buried on the southern shore of Botany Bay in 1770, who had acquired the status as 'first white man buried' on Australian soil, the remembered testimony of an old Aboriginal woman, Sally Mettymong, was summoned from the past to help identify where the man's remains lay, and thus the most appropriate spot for a monument to him.

Mettymong's testimony was introduced into the deliberations about where to place a monument to mark Sutherland's burial place by a Mr Laycock, then aged 78, who as a young boy had lived in the vicinity. According to Laycock, when he was about six years old, Mettymong would take him for walks along the beach, and when they passed the spot in question she would point and say 'white man buried there'.²⁸ These saunters took place in the 1850s, at which time Mettymong was apparently already 80 years old, which makes her a contemporary of the Indigenous people from the area when Cook sailed into the bay.

Although Mettymong's reported testimony was challenged in 1924 by Charles H Bertie in the same article discussed earlier, a monument to Forby Sutherland was nonetheless erected at the spot which her remembered testimony had identified, although not for another decade.²⁹ Mettymong does not appear at all in the monument's inscription, which simply states that Forby Sutherland was buried 'near here'. Nevertheless, she is part of the story about the inauguration of this particular monument, which occurred in the early part of the twentieth century.³⁰ Thus, in the process by which the Royal Australian Historical Society sought to preserve the memory of Forby Sutherland, even though some of its members questioned the veracity of her inherited memory, the old Aboriginal woman, Sally Mettymong, entered the records to become a remembered past presence in the same landscape. Her previous presence in the place was recorded, just like Cruwee's was in the case of the engraved tree stump marking the French priest's grave, in the context of public memory and the commemoration of the European past. Paradoxically, the history of her previous presence became attached to a monument marking, whether exactly or not, the grave of a seaman from Cook's voyage, whose burial was by this time widely interpreted as signaling British posses-

28. Appendix to Bertie 1924: 276.

29. Once again, the dispute about the precise location of the grave was fought out in the pages of the *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*. See for instance, 'Report of a visit to Kurnell of the Committee of the Royal Australian Historical Society appointed to investigate the question of the burial place of Forby Sutherland', Appendix to Bertie 1924; MacDonald 1928.

30. For a longer discussion of this, see Nugent 2006: 86-93.

sion of the territory. This is most clearly reflected in Barron Field's poem which claimed that Sutherland's 'Christian burial better did proclaim/ Possession, than the flag, in England's name'.³¹ The local history of the local monument, then, contains some evidence, admittedly not very visible, of Aboriginal presence at the site in the middle of the nineteenth century, which might or might not be continuous with that belonging to 1770.

Perhaps more importantly, this scrap of reported testimony, which is summoned forth within the early twentieth-century context of public memory, can become the raw material for weaving a complementary story about the ways in which Aboriginal people claimed to possess local knowledge about the pasts of others. In such a corresponding and interrelated story, Sally Mettymong might become linked with Cruwee, with Billy Rowley and his mother, and with many others who appear from this time onwards saying things about what they know about Captain Cook, or Joseph Banks, or Lapérouse, or Pere Receveur, or Captain Phillip, or any other white man who stepped ashore at Botany Bay.³²

Enter Robert Timberly

When it was decided in 1950 to erect a monument to mark where Captain Arthur Phillip had first stepped ashore at Botany Bay, Aboriginal 'eyewitness' testimony was not called upon as a source for identifying where precisely his landing had taken place. The task of locating the spot for the monument fell to Charles H Bertie, and his search was confined exclusively to the documentary records.³³

But while those involved in a memorial project to commemorate physically an 'original' encounter no longer paid much heed to Aboriginal eyewitness testimony in their historical researches, the monument itself and the occasion of its inauguration were sources for stories about Aboriginal presence in place, both past and present.³⁴ Unlike all the other monuments discussed so far, this one includes on its inscription reference to Indigenous people at the time that Phillip made his 'first' landing. At the insistence of some involved in the memorial project, a plaque containing information about Phillip's encounter with local Indigenous men was included on the monument.³⁵ And while the memorialists did not go looking for the testimony of an Indigenous eyewitness to establish the proper location for the monument, in this case local Aboriginal people living in the vicinity of the monument at the time of its inauguration ascribed to themselves something of this role.

The monument was unveiled on 18 January 1956 at three o'clock, exactly 168 years after the event that it marked. The ceremony included predictable elements: the performance of a historical re-enactment of Phillip arriving on shore in a long boat and speeches by dignitaries that served as history lessons. Many local Aboriginal people

31. Barron Field, 'On visiting the spot where Captain Cook and Sir Joseph Banks first landed at Botany Bay', *Sydney Gazette*, 22 March 1822, cited in Healy 1997: 42-43.

32. The author is currently engaged in a research project examining Aboriginal people's historical remembrance in south-eastern Australia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries tentatively titled 'Blackfella Historians', which draws on these types of Aboriginal testimony.

33. Bertie 1952: 107-26.

34. For a longer discussion of this monument, see Nugent 2005: 132-136.

35. See Nugent 2005: 133.

attended the unveiling. One newspaper report noted that there were 'about 800 sightseers, many of them from the La Perouse reserve'.³⁶ One had come with a gift in hand. Robert Timberly explained to an official that he had 'made this boomerang myself for the Governor. Souvenir for him. Show we're still friendly'.³⁷ His reference to 'show we're still friendly' indicated that this relationship had its origins in the very first time the two groups came into contact, when the local Indigenous people had shown Phillip where to find water. By this exchange, Timberly reminded the Governor of his relationship, as a representative of the government, with the Aboriginal people on whose behalf Timberly spoke. Timberly was invited to sit on the dais along with the official guests, and after the formal program was over he was allowed to present the boomerang to the Governor.

The improvised exchange between Timberly and the Governor has been depicted as symbolically re-enacting the relations between Phillip and local Aborigines that had occurred during the actual encounter at the site in January 1788. That it was in spirit, at least, an authentic representation of the original encounter was underscored by repeated reference to two powerful links connecting the present-day participants with the past. The recipient of the boomerang, the governor of New South Wales, was described as the 33rd in direct line from Governor Phillip to hold that office. Robert Timberly, the maker and presenter of the boomerang, described himself as the 'oldest direct descendant at Yarra Bay of the tribe which was there when Captain Phillip arrived'.³⁸

This claimed continuous descent from those 'natives' who had witnessed, encountered and had exchanges with Phillip in 1788 belonged to a local tradition, probably at least a hundred years old by the 1950s, whereby local Aboriginal people had claimed to be the direct descendents of those on the shore when either Captain Cook (1770), or Lap  rouse (1788), or Captain Phillip (1788) arrived in the bay.³⁹ It was this local Aboriginal tradition to claim the status as eyewitnesses, or at least to be the direct descendants of eyewitnesses, which had also been in evidence in the mid-nineteenth century, when the figure of the Aboriginal eyewitness was incorporated into the stories told about monuments that had been added to the landscape decades earlier. This tradition had endured for decades so that even though mid-twentieth-century historians and memorialists had lost faith in Aboriginal testimony as an historical source, their memorial project nonetheless provided an occasion for local Aboriginal people to make public their claims to fulfilling this very role.

Conclusion

When Chris Healy was undertaking his study into black and white Australian social memory, he was working in a period when black and white histories were primarily understood as oppositional to each other, the former talking back to the latter in order to expose and challenge the silences and misrepresentations that had long characterised

36. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 January 1956: 2.

37. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 January 1956: 2.

38. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 January 1956: 2. See also Randwick Municipal Council, Mayoral Minute, 17 January 1956.

39. See footnote 21 for some examples.

it. In this context, evidence of *exchanges* between Indigenous people and 'white' historians, antiquarians and monument-makers were interpreted negatively, as abuses of Aboriginal testimony, for instance, or as missed opportunities for the production of two-sided, dialogical histories.⁴⁰ In this paper I have sketched an approach in which local histories of colonial memorial projects can tell us more about, and more than, the 'abuse' and 'misuse' of Aboriginal people's historical memory by settler Australians. These local histories of colonial memorials provide windows onto the shifting uses of, and esteem given to, Aboriginal testimony in colonial forms of history. As the contexts of public memory and history changes, so does the assessment and valorisation of Aboriginal historical testimony. Moreover, a (purported) piece of Aboriginal historical testimony is sometimes at the centre of contestations over historical evidence, and historical method, among 'settler' historians.

It is now the case that we know much about how it was that Aboriginal people dropped from view in Australian history, or were not a visible presence on the physical edifices erected to what was popularly understood as a heroic and pioneering past. Yet, there is still much to learn about how Aboriginal people themselves variously engaged with colonial forms of commemoration, and with colonial historical narratives, throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. In this paper, I have suggested that the figure of the Aboriginal eyewitness is one means by which to investigate these practices, noting however that the figure should not be taken as given. Rather, my point is that the Aboriginal eyewitness as he or she appears in the archive can sometimes be read as evidence of Aboriginal people's engagement with colonial historical practices as well as a product of colonial historical practices. In this way, the 'eyewitness' can tell us something about Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal forms of history-making in the colonial period, and the nature of their relationship to each other.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the generous assistance of the National Museum of Australia through its National Museum Research Fellowship Program.

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'Karoo : Mates' — Communities reclaim their images

Heather Goodall

Aboriginal researchers were looking for a title when they put together a booklet showing the 1938 Brewarrina photographs from the Tindale Archive, held by the South Australian Museum, as they prepared for the 'Back to Brewarrina' weekend in 1994. After a lot of discussion, they decided to call it 'Karoo', a word often heard in greetings all along the river and deriving from a term for a kin relationship.¹ For them this word has broadened its meaning to encompass wider networks. It is now used, they felt, more like the term 'mates', suggesting companionable friendship, which was the English word they chose to stand next to it in the title. Their choice of 'Karoo : Mates' reflected their affectionate warmth towards the people themselves but also their sense of the bonds across and beyond families, linking the people in those old photographs not only with tradition but with change, with both the present and the future.

Photographs are now well recognised as treasured objects among Aboriginal communities and there are a growing number of insightful and sensitive explorations of the ways in which Aboriginal people create meanings about the past and the present through photographs. But the work of Margaret Somerville,² Gaynor Macdonald³ and others have each been reflections on established Aboriginal uses of photographs which had been developing over some time and of which the analysts had only recently become aware. We have seldom been able to consider what happens when a whole body of photographs suddenly becomes available. How are the images seen and used? What stories can they be made to tell? And by whom? Because it is of course not only for Aboriginal Australians that photographs can be made to tell stories.

Photographs have played a key role, as Nicholas Peterson has pointed out,⁴ for settler Australia in constructing its narratives of itself. Photography took over from naturalist drawing as colonising scientists tried to stabilise and categorise the Indigenous peoples in the new colony. Ethnographers and anthropologists have used photography

1. This word is common to Ngiyampaa, Yuwalaraay and Gamilaraay languages, at least, and is heard frequently as an affectionate greeting amongst peers. An alternative spelling would be *garu*. A common greeting all along the river, (among men) is 'Yaama, garu!'

2. Cohen and Somerville 1990: 138-155.

3. Macdonald 2003: 225-242.

4. Peterson in Donaldson and Donaldson 1985.

for a range of research methodologies and a large body of critical literature has grown up, reflecting on the shift from biometric recording to powerful evocative statements like the northern Australian images of Donald Thompson, all of which nevertheless raise questions about the positioning and objectification of the photographer's subjects as the 'other'. Most recently, historians including myself have drawn on images to go beyond illustration in order to generate stories of the past.

This paper sketches the way one section of the most famous of the settler/scientific photographic archives, made under the direction of anthropologist Norman Tindale in 1938-39, has been reclaimed by Aboriginal communities in north-western New South Wales. While long available for scholarly research, the Tindale images have only recently become available for public use, partly as a result of Aboriginal research and pressure for release in not just individual but collective forms. The subsequent republication of the photographs can be read to tell not one but many stories, some about the past and some about the future. The choice by the Brewarrina researchers to give the name 'Karoo : Mates' to their collection suggests a fruitful way to understand the relationship between archives and the communities from whom they have been generated.

It is important here to warn those who may be distressed that these pages contain photographs of the dead, as well as an account of the way their stories continue to live.

These photographs were taken as part of the large field survey conducted by the South Australian Museum and Harvard University in a study coordinated by Norman Tindale to establish the distribution of tribal groups in Australia. He had a strong interest in challenging the prevailing racism and mythologies about Aborigines as rootless nomads by recording contemporary Aboriginal people's perceptions of land and language affiliations and, ultimately, creating a map which would demonstrate these affiliations.⁵ He did not personally supervise all the photographs, and he himself is not remembered by people who were residents of the large settlements where his photographs were collected. Instead Aboriginal people today, who were children in 1938, recall glimpses of the young people who actually carried out the survey, photographing residents of the big stations and recording brief notes on their language, 'tribe' and place affiliations.

The camp was a tent off to one side of the Aboriginal houses and there are no memories of shared times after work or on the riverbank. Although the field notes do not reveal any close relationship, each photographed person was asked about their language affiliation and relationships, from which a genealogy was prepared for each family, with notes on the side of complex diagrams. Overall the archive includes the photographs, a file card record associated with each person photographed, an estimation of their 'caste' and a genealogy for each of the major families to which many of the photographed people had contributed. At least some of the family tree material, according to Aboriginal people who are reviewing it today, probably reflects half

5. Philip Jones, South Australian Museum, nd, Norman Barnett ('Tinny') Tindale on South Australian Museum site, <http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/page/default.asp?site=2&page=tindale>, accessed 16 September 2006.

understood communications and misheard words, with a few guesses on the part of the researchers and the occasional piece of tactful dissembling by Aboriginal informants. In just a few key situations in Brewarrina, one of which I will discuss later, the young staff took down verbatim what the Aboriginal person being photographed wanted to say, and then a startling, powerful first person voice comes through.

The Aboriginal research project and its people

This project was initiated by members of the communities in north-west New South Wales who had a connection to Brewarrina from 1938, when the photographs were taken. The early contact with the South Australian Museum where the collection was housed had been begun in particular by George Rose and Joey Flick. George Rose was a senior Yuwalaraay man, shearer and co-founder of the Aboriginal Legal Service in rural New South Wales. He was from Walgett and had been a boy at Brewarrina at the time the photos were taken. Joey Flick was from Collarenebri, further upstream on the Barwon, and his mother was Isobelle Walford, who had, like George, been a teenager at Brewarrina in 1938 (figs 1 and 2). With young children of his own, Joey was acutely conscious of the absence of local educational resources for Aboriginal children. From his employment in the public service in both the Northern Territory and New South Wales, Joey understood bureaucratic practice from the inside and was

a tenacious researcher and community advocate. George and Joey undertook the project on behalf of the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service for whom they were seeking return of the whole set of photographs from the area.



Fig 1: George Rose with Tombo Winters, 2002, Collarenebri. Both were moved as boys from Angledool to Brewarrina in 1936. Photo: the author.



Fig 2: Joey Flick, 2002, Collarenebri. Photo: the author.

In a series of visits, Joey and George felt they were under suspicion from Museum staff, who would only allow them to view the photographs and genealogies under supervision. Joey felt the photographs and other material were not well prepared for display, particularly not as a group, in that they were more-or-less jumbled together in a box and had little contextual information. The incoming Native Title process was being widely debated at that stage, eventually to be established under the Federal *Native Title Act* of 1993. The early indications were that this process was going to retain a strong emphasis, derived from western legal conventions, on documentary evidence and biological descent. Not unreasonably, this troubled many people, both members of the Aboriginal community and researchers alike because it was so different from Indigenous traditions of oral transmission of kinship knowledge and the broad cultural as well as biological bases for land and kinship affiliations. There appeared to be a concern among Museum staff that the often unverified material in the genealogies, in particular, might be used inappropriately as evidence in legal proceedings before the Native Title Tribunal. There was also an anxiety about privacy legalities which was reflected in Museum requirements which privileged individual or tightly-defined biological family searches of photographic and other material rather than community-wide searches. To this day, the South Australian Museum's guidelines for requests to view photographic and other material instruct researchers to inquire only about photographs of people directly related to the researcher.⁶

The goal which George Rose and Joey Flick had in 1992, which was to take home the photographs of a whole community, was not consistent with the approach the South Australian Museum wanted to take at that stage. With rising frustration George and Joey withdrew to reconsider their strategies for repatriation.

Around a year later, Joey reactivated the attempt to bring the photographs home, this time in conjunction with Roy and June Barker who were then living in Brewarrina and managing the Aboriginal Cultural Museum on the banks of the Barwon River there. Roy and June had each a long history of community cultural work: Roy spent his childhood at Brewarrina in the 1920s and 1930s, where his father Jimmie was the station handyman and later wrote a celebrated account of his memories.⁷ June's father Duncan Ferguson had been a key lay preacher at Brewarrina and her grandfather Bill Ferguson was a major political activist in the 1930s. Together they were planning a commemorative gathering in Brewarrina on the site of the old Protection Board station to take place on the mid-year long weekend in 1994. In the previous decade there had been a series of community activities along the Darling River, as the land rights movement and other campaigns encouraged people to nurture the invaluable collective memories which resided in their older members. These were more easily shared in visits to the old sites of shared experiences. Many had taken the form of the 'Back to ...' events, in which Roy, June and Joey had all taken part and they were aware of the role which photographs had in stimulating memories and getting conversations flowing. So they were, if anything, even more determined to have the photographs returned as a group, rather than in piecemeal fashion, individual by individual. Moreover, while the focus was on the particular local event, the whole reason for the long weekend camp was that the

6. <http://www.samuseum.sa.gov.au/>, accessed 16 September 2006.

7. Mathews 1977.

people who had been at Brewarrina in 1938 now lived across the region and had strong links with the other major communities which the Tindale recording team had visited along the river, from Menindee to Boggabilla. So Joey, Roy and June wanted the whole region's photographs returned in a group, not just town by town, let alone individual by individual.

Over this year, Joey Flick felt that the South Australian Museum had matured in its attitude. It was now more welcoming of Aboriginal researchers and community members, better organised in its viewing arrangements and more receptive to proposals to repatriate photographs as a collective rather than as individual images. The negotiations were still complex, as the South Australian Museum worked with the community researchers to ensure that the privacy of individuals who may be affected by unreliable genealogies would be effectively protected. This time, eventually, the community was successful in securing repatriation of the images, in a block, with the Brewarrina Cultural Centre being the official recipient along with comparable organisations in the other major towns in the region to which community members were affiliated.

Having brought the collection home, Joey, June and Roy were then faced with the decision of how to present them for the 'Back To Brewarrina' weekend. The issue was one of selection and exclusion, not of the images themselves, which were all included, but of the written material which displayed the Tindale project assumptions and goals. The Aboriginal decision was that the genealogies should remain unpublicised and available only to family members while the field notes were of widely varying length and quality. They hoped that the images themselves would not carry the burden of the survey team's incomplete understanding of what they were being told. Their aim was to spark memories and start conversations and so, with support from another Walgett man of Joey's generation, Bob Morgan, then heading up Jumbunna, the University of Technology Sydney's Indigenous unit, the images were printed as good quality reproductions on heavy paper, to withstand being handed around many times over. They were laid out in as plain a manner as possible, limiting the textual accompaniment to the person's name, their age as recorded by the Tindale team at the time of the photograph and the number allocated to that photograph in the archive.

So the booklet played its part in a memorable Brewarrina weekend and did indeed start lots of conversations. It has continued to be passed around from hand to hand in the area and forms the nucleus of many plans to gather smaller family or local histories in which to use the photographs. I will return to the ways in which the communities of the north-west have read and used these photographs, but first I want to consider two other approaches to this collection of photographs as they appear in 'Karoo : Mates'. What meanings might we draw from such a selection and arrangement? The variety of ways in which this plain, almost austere publication can be understood tells us a lot about how yielding photographs are to various readings. And it suggests the ways in which varied outcomes can arise from different contextualisations and questions. I'll sketch out two such readings here, although there are many others, and then consider the ways the communities have used these photographs. Not only does each approach suggest different meanings to be drawn from the photographs, but each bears a different relationship to time.

1. A reading at 'face value'

A direct observation, a reading 'at face value', is the sort of reading which many researchers often have to make of photographs found in old albums, in random personal debris, or in the formal archive but without any provenance. Ross Gibson has explored some of the ways we can imaginatively reconstruct the context and meaning of such uncontextualised images in his work with early archival photographs and more recently with forensic archives.⁸ Were the images able to escape the burden of assumptions which the survey team may have imposed on their production?

There are things to be learnt just from looking at these Tindale photographs as a set of individual pictures, even though they tell us little about anything except the split second in which the shutter was open and the film exposed. The numbering system is sequential, with only a few gaps, and apparently indicates the order in which the photographs were taken.⁹ It seems from this archive sequence (as is confirmed by the survey field notes) that the order in which the photographs were taken arose from the contingencies of the day's events for each person. Who happened to be walking past to go the store or to school or to go fishing at which time? They were the ones called in to be photographed next in line. Few of the people in the photograph look relaxed but nor are they reticent. Most stare back steadily at the photographer, not cowed but nevertheless cautious and skeptical (fig 3). Only some of the children are smiling. We can suspect there was little emotional affinity between subject and photographer, although the researchers may just have told everyone not to smile.

These photographs are largely full-frontal and close-up images. This positioning of the subjects makes them markedly different to those taken by anthropologists TG Taylor and R Jardine in 1924 in similar rural areas, where full frontal and profile shots of the same individuals were taken with the obvious intention of recording skull proportions and facial shape.¹⁰ An interest in physical and biological anthropology is still evident in later New South Wales work, such as the investigation into the social outcomes of racial mixture, as is evident in even the culturally oriented work by Marie Reay and Grace Sidlington in their New South Wales fieldwork in the 1930s and 1940s.¹¹ The Tindale survey team recorded their impression of 'caste' for each person photographed and were clearly also concerned to track the course of racial mixture (through the genealogies) and its manifestation in physical appearance. However, the photographs and notes are notable for the absence of forensic and dehumanising 'profile' and 'head measuring' images like those of Taylor and Jardine. Despite acknowledging that Tindale was still very much concerned with physical race it is also important to recognise the influences on anthropological photography which arose from outside anthropology and instead from developments in wider popular and journalistic photography. In fact the Tindale images are much more of the type of direct 'documentary' shots taken by Walker Evans for *Fortune* magazine in 1936, when he made his frank and confronting photographic records of Alabama sharecroppers in the Depression.¹²

8. Ross Gibson 1992.

9. Personal communication, Joe Flick Jnr.

10. Taylor and Jardine 1924.

11. Reay 1945; Reay and Sidlington 1948.

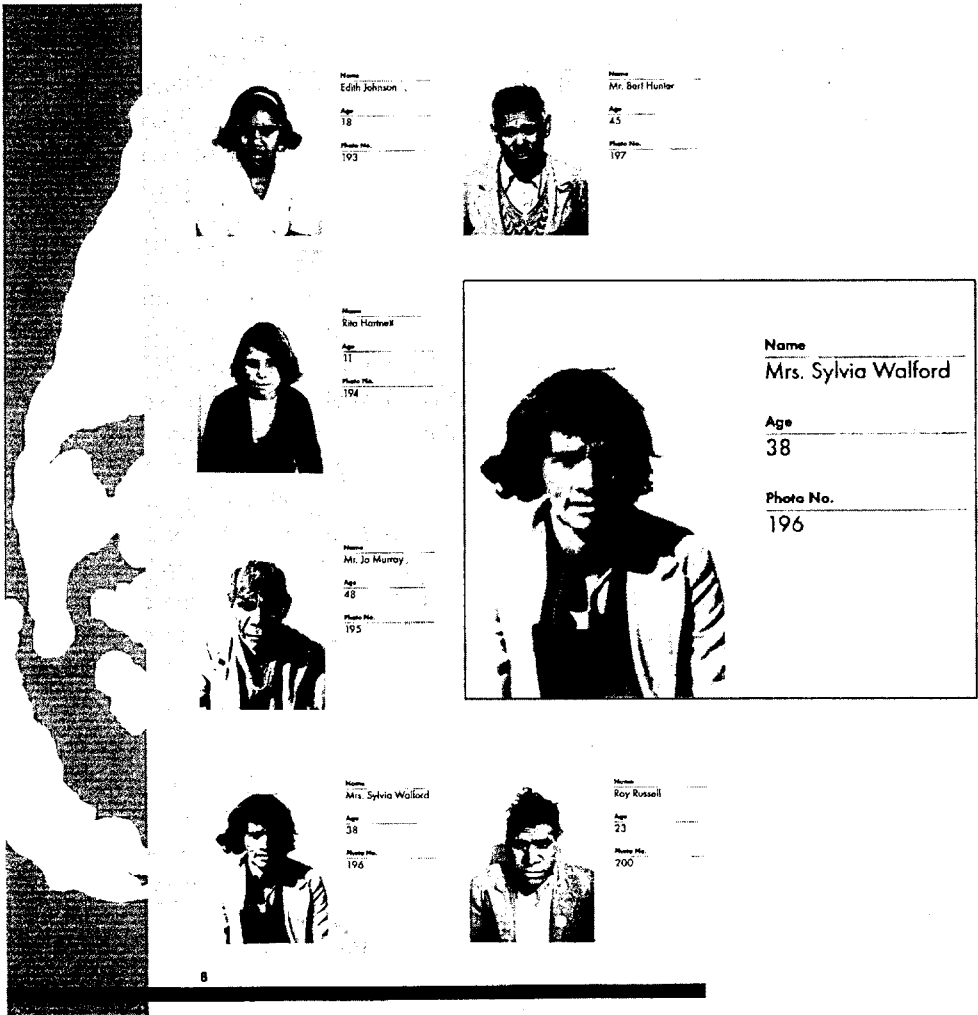


Fig 3: A page from 'Karoo : Mates', detail of Mrs Sylvia Walford, Joey Flick's grandmother. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

Even so, a notable difference lies here too. Walker Evans posed his subjects in ways which showed them surrounded by and interacting with the objects of their daily lives, however impoverished and threadbare their homes might appear to city audiences. The people captured in Tindale's collection are not only photographed without visible homes and domestic objects, they are divorced even more significantly from the surrounding lands and from any family. In only one or two photographs of children is there more than one person portrayed. So while the intention of these photographic recordings was not anthropometric, there is nothing else to invest meaning to these images apart from considerations about the physical diversity of phenotype, nothing,

12. Published by James Agee as *And Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, 1941.

that is, except the intense, suspicious and direct gaze of the subjects. What we know of the goals and outcomes of Tindale's work suggest strongly that he was sympathetic to the Aboriginal people whose photographs he was recording, but these cautious stares suggest there was little close communication with people there. Certainly those people who were young at the time remember only an awkward sort of joking relationship with the young researchers.

The photographs are of excellent quality. This reflects Tindale's successful recruitment of Harvard University financial support for his field survey, which he had long hoped would demonstrate the affiliations of Aboriginal people with particular places and record them in photographs, where and as they lived in the present, rather than seeking to reconstruct some romanticised past. His equipment was first class: this was the latest technology, the most modern machine of 'modernity', brought to the service of observing Aborigines. The resulting sharp, clear images seem to magnify the sense of tension in the recording situation.

2. *A historian's reading*

Thinking about interpreting this archive made my own approach as a historian more visible to me. I have tried to locate the images in their surrounding time and place, aware particularly of their context which was the momentous impact of the Depression and the reorientation it caused to Protection Board policy. As an active researcher in the 1980s and later, when I became aware of these images, I was using the archives to reconstruct the policies of the Protection Board as they were implemented on the ground at Brewarrina and trawling through the written records generated by Tindale's Anthropological Survey. But I was just as eagerly recording oral histories. So my knowledge of the context for these images included the community memories of the photographed person's life and activities in Brewarrina itself and their impact on others. The story I tell from these images is therefore at the intersection of a conventional archivally-based training with the community sources of memory and retelling. Nevertheless, the outcome is 'historical', pinned to a particular time/space and a chronology, in a way which becomes more evident in the comparisons I will draw later with community approaches.

The first thing that I noticed in contextualising the images in their chronology was that the survey had, completely by accident, recorded the effects of the Board's major policy shift: from the dispersal of Aboriginal populations prior to 1934 to the enforced transfer and 'concentration' as the Board termed it, of the populations already living on smaller reserves and settlements. The story is written in the photographic recordings, embodied in the faces of the people all photographed in the same place in the short space of time of the survey (fig 4). Catalysed by the unemployment crisis of the Depression, the Board decided to enforce moves, beginning to implement them from 1934, although it only had authorising legislation from 1936. It forced the transfer of the members of three communities into Brewarrina station, from Quambone in 1934, Angledool in 1936 and Tibooburra in 1938.¹³ In Brewarrina they lived closely and uneasily with the previously established station residents. Tindale's field survey covered four states, all with different policies, and its activities bore no relation to the

¹³. A detailed account of this series of enforced moves can be found in Goodall 1996: 193–218.

Brewarrina families

Richard Howell
Name: Richard Howell
Age: 54/64
Photo No.: 201

Mrs. Una Hartnett
Name: Mrs. Una Hartnett
Age: 30
Photo No.: 207

Tibooburra family

Malachi Barnes
Name: Malachi Barnes
Age: 45/58
Photo No.: 202

Harry Hartnett
Name: Harry Hartnett
Age: 37
Photo No.: 208

Quambone families

Alfred Carr
Name: Alfred Carr
Tom Carr
Age: 9yrs & 6mths
6yrs & 6mths
Photo No.: 203-04

Mrs. Lexie Murray
Name: Mrs. Lexie Murray
Age: 44
Photo No.: 209

Angledool family

Mary Carr
Name: Mary Carr
Grace Lee
Age: 9yrs & 10mths
7yrs & 10mths
Photo No.: 205-06

Mrs. Eileen Howell
Name: Mrs. Eileen Howell
Age: 28
Photo No.: 210

9

Fig 4: The concentration impact. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

NSW Board's policy: its presence and recording of the outcome of that policy shift was happenstance. Photographed as they were in random order, each page in 'Karoo : Mates' turns out to contain images of families from a number of these 'concentrated' populations. Some pages have people from all four communities. Alongside the old Brewarrina families like the Gordons and the McHughes can be found those from Quambone, the Carrs and the Carneys among others, who were the first to be moved in the 1930s. Then the Angledool population were dumped there in May 1936, bringing the Walfords (Joey Flick's family), the Hardys, the Fernandos (George Rose's family), the Trapmans and others, around 120 people in all. And finally the Tibooburra mob came, shifted in during 1938, some 150 Wankumara-speaking people from a distant location near the South Australian border and a very different cultural group.

Secondly, the anthropological survey photographs had, again by accident, shown some of the key figures in the communities' resistance. Some of them, like Ike Handy and George Dutton, were ordinary people who have been remembered as those who either risked their own security or, more frighteningly in those days of 'kids' collecting',¹⁴ risked the security of their families to voice their own and their community's anger at the enforced transfers. Others, like Granny Helen, were people who refused to swerve from their accustomed ways and in doing so offered an assertive and defiant face to the disorientation of the rough journey and the ill-prepared makeshift accommodation that greeted each lot of new arrivals when they got off the trucks.

Ike Handy (fig 5) was an African-American married to an Aboriginal woman and he and his family used to camp outside the Angledool station fence so their children could attend the school. Ike was literate and so he had been asked by the Angledool Aboriginal community to scribe their letter of protest to the Protection Board. He read out some of the letter to his family, and his daughter Donnas remembers the issues that were of such concern:

The bit of it Dad was reading out [said] that the people didn't want to move from the mission because that's where they were getting work and everything like that. The men were known on the stations, every man sort of had a station. Old Henry Hardy and all of them were regulars out there, see, so if they went to Brewarrina where would they go? See, they'd have to get used to be on Yarrawon and Gillgowan but they already had Brewarrina men. So that's the reason why they didn't want to go, see. They put that down there — an excuse that they didn't



Name _____
Mr. Handy

Age _____
58

Photo No. _____
180

Fig 5: Ike Handy. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

¹⁴ One of the colloquial phrases used to describe the New South Wales Protection Board power to act *in loco parentis* and to summarily remove any Aboriginal children from their families, 'to send to service' or 'for being aboriginal' and indenture them for four years.

want to go. And they had their people buried in the cemetery there. Dark people are like that, you know, they don't like leaving their dead ... people they like to get buried there with them, see. ... I reckon that'd be a strong reason because they've got their own little cemetery up there.¹⁵

The move was pushed ahead. Amidst threats and tears those Angledool families who felt most threatened — those with young children — were hustled onto the trucks with what belongings they could carry. They eventually arrived at Brewarrina at 11 o'clock at night. There are many memories with conflicting details about the arrival, but everyone who was there remembers how very cold it was. Jack Barker, then a Brewarrina Station teenager, recalled the scene as the trucks pulled up, with people climbing down, wrapped in thin, Board-issue 'Gubby' blankets, searching for wood to light fire buckets against the cold.¹⁶ The priority, however, was not to get warm but to find a house. Henry Hardy and a mate jumped off the truck as soon as it stopped, leaving their families to help themselves down, while they rushed over to the row of tiny, half completed houses to select ones next to each other and at the end of the row for quietness. Jack Barker has described the houses in similar terms to Henry's:

They had two-roomed tin shacks half built for 'em. They was about 10 feet by 20. And they had windows made out of tin afterwards, but they weren't on 'em till afterwards, so they had just the holes. No doors and no windows. They got here about 11 o'clock at night. They wasn't completed them huts! ... Cement floor and no beds.¹⁷

Those who had protested against the move but who had been forced to come anyway were not forgotten. The Murris who had drafted the letter of protest were called up to the Manager's office, where the manager and the Board's Inspector Smithers abused them and threatened them with expulsion from the station (without their families) should they continue such activities. Ike Handy too was warned that he would be closely watched.¹⁸

Granny Helen was not a spokesperson. She was a frail, tiny old woman, believed to be around 90 years old in 1938 (fig 6). She too had been brought down from Angledool on that cold night in May 1936. But Granny Helen carried history with her. The survey team noted on the brief notes about her that she was 'taken when they were shooting the Aborigines'.¹⁹ She was one of the Yuwalaraay who had a strong role in sustaining traditional knowledge. At Angledool she was one of the people frequently heard singing traditional songs and the one who had overseen the rituals that accompanied events like burials. Isobelle Walford remembered Granny Helen as someone 'who was always welcoming people' who came onto her home country at Angledool.²⁰

She seems to have tried to fulfil the same role in the confusion of the arrival at Brewarrina. Some people, like Jack Barker, have a vivid memory of Granny Helen on

15. Interview with Donnas Barker, conducted by author, July 1994, Dubbo.

16. Interview with Jack Barker, conducted by author, 1978, Brewarrina.

17. Interview with Jack Barker, conducted by author, 1978, Brewarrina.

18. Interview with Jack Barker, conducted by author, 1978, Brewarrina.

19. Record number 168, Tindale Archives, recording interviews with residents of Brewarrina Station.

20. Interview with Isobelle Walford Flick, conducted by author, 1996, Dubbo.



Name _____
Mrs. Helen
Age _____
90
Photo No. _____
168

Fig 6: Granny Helen. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

the first night the Angledool people arrived. Others, particularly those arriving from Angledool and so perhaps caught up in the confusion, do not recall her activities that night but they do remember her doing similar things later. As Jack Barker recalls, he and his younger brother Roy were allowed to go and see the newcomers. He remembered how cold it was because they had to wear their dressing gowns and slippers, and they felt the sharp contrast between their comfort

and the bewildered Angledool arrivals:

We pestered Mum to go up there. And we was nice and warm, because we had our slippers and dressin' gowns on. And we run up there, and they was unloading these people, all gettin' off these trailers up there, these semi-trailers, with Gubby blankets. And it was a cold winter's night! So anyway they gathered up wood there, and it wasn't very long they had 8 or 10 fire buckets around the flat there, they're all going! They were pouring petrol on'em like this, lightn'em! They had 'em all going! And when they had the glare of the light, here's old Granny Helen out there, and she's givin' a big corroboree, middle of the night in the cold weather! And she's singin' a song in the lingo and corroboree'in' too, on her own. It was the first time we seen a corroboree like that, an old woman on her own. She's making her own songs and corroboreein' too! Gee we got a great kick out of that!²¹

The Tibooburra community of 150 people was shifted without warning from the 'corner country' on the border of South Australia to Brewarrina in 1938. **George Dutton**, a Wangkumarra man, did not arrive with his family but he was there by the time the survey team arrived and so his photograph is in the archive too (fig 7). He had been working on a property outside the town when word reached him that his family had been forced onto the trucks to go to Brewarrina. He was furious that he had to leave his job in such a hurry and it meant as well that he did not have time to collect the £75 owing to him. Months later, when the Tindale researchers came to Brewarrina station, George Dutton had still received no reply to his letters asking about sending the money on. He told the researchers what he thought when they asked him for his family connections and, for once, perhaps shocked by his anger, they copied his words down verbatim. This account is direct confirmation of the memories of both Angledool and other Tibooburra people that state that the most powerful weapon which the Protection Board held over people was its threat to their children:

Object to idea of being brought from Tibooburra. Want to go back and will soon go back. Nothing here for a man to do.

²¹. Interview with Jack Barker, conducted by author, 1978, Brewarrina.

The treatment we get here is no good. We can do better in Tibooburra. Much more meat there, better conditions. We should be treated for bad eyes in our own country, not taken away to a strange country.

No work here for us. On the Paroo, I can get work.

We [were] told that if we did not move to Brewarrina they would take our children away from us. That's the only reason why we came.²²



Name	George Dutton
Age	50
Photo No.	143

Fig 7: George Dutton. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

These three strong individuals confront us from the pages of the 'Karoo : Mates' book, challenging the photographer, and we the viewers standing still further behind, to consider that they too have a statement to make.

So these are the stories which can be told by gathering the rich sources of the historian's archives and the community's memories around the images. It allows us to reimagine the time and its changes as far as the historian's craft can recompose that dynamic web. These stories from the past have often been welcomed in north-western Aboriginal communities, whether they are tragic or funny or inspiring. However, they remain locked into a bounded time frame, anchored by the skills of historical research into a fixed and dated position, whatever the lessons and examples which might be drawn from them in the present.

The community chose different ways to use the images, ways which unlocked that boundary around the time of the photographs and linked them through into the present.

3. *A community reading*

The weekend at Brewarrina in 1994 was marked by many conversations over the photographs, in which people talked over the images and made connections which took each photograph outside the artificial sequence of the Tindale recording session. The first way in which this happened was that people discovered photographs they did not know had existed, and in some cases this was the only known or surviving photograph of a family member. Floods and fires and mobility take their toll on family photographic collections, despite the fact that Aboriginal people in New South Wales now treasure photographs despite continuing customary burning, among many families, of the possessions of those who had passed away.

So for some people, this archive represents something very different from the documentation of the Tindale survey team. It offers a new chance to glimpse a loved one: to

²². Record number 143, Tindale Archives, recording interviews with residents of Brewarrina station. Jeremy Beckett has discussed George Dutton's experiences in his essay (Beckett 1978).

reclaim them by drawing them in again to a family and to extend the sense of resolution among family members that they have linked themselves to a wider network of kin. Once these photographs became accessible to individual family researchers, a decade or so ago, they were copied and brought literally into the family through albums or through additions to the carefully husbanded collections of photographs in boxes or trunks, standing on dressing tables or hanging on walls. Margaret Somerville and Patsy Cohen, writing about Patsy's community at Ingleba, and Gaynor Macdonald writing about Wiradjuri communities, have each described with warmth and insight how these collections of photographs have been used to build and rebuild a sense of living networks between people now separated through time and space.²³



Name	_____
Mona Winters	_____
Age	_____
32	_____
Photo No.	_____
241	_____

Fig 8: Sisters Sylvia Walford (left) and Mona Winters (right), the daughters of Ada Woods and George Fernando Snr. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

One of the numerous examples from the Tindale collection was the photograph of Joey Flick's grandmother, Sylvia Walford. There is only one other photograph of her, taken of her as a young teenager with her sisters, again in an institutional setting, by the Protection Board at Cootamundra Girls Home to which most of the siblings were removed. In the Tindale collection she is photographed alone, like the other adults. But the survey team also happened to photograph one of her sisters, Mona Winters, who had also been forced to move down from Angledool with her children. Repatriating the whole collection meant that these two photographs of siblings could be brought together. They could also be seen in the context of the community in which they lived as adults (fig 8). While, like every one of the adults photographed, Sylvia and Mona are looking skeptical and cautious, their families do not emphasise this quality when they talk about or show the photographs now. When these images are seen in rows printed on the pages of the Tindale archive booklet, you are struck by their note of suspicion of the photographer. But when I have seen them since in frames on family walls or carefully placed in albums, this seems to have receded. Certainly the families' own sense of having brought these images back to be among relations has coloured the way they are

²³. Cohen and Somerville 1990; Macdonald 2003.

seen and read, to override the tension between the survey team and their subjects with the closeness of past and present family ties.

Another example of a recomposition which had not been achieved before the return of the Tindale archives as a collection is that of the family of Ike Handy, who had played such a prominent role in the response to the Angledool move. There are few occasions when all the members of an Aboriginal family were photographed simultaneously in the 1930s. While the survey team had a research methodology of making a synchronic, 'slice of time' image of the community, the value of this approach to the families is different. It offers a rare chance to see how everyone looked at the same time, as a family unit. So even though they were photographed separately, the collective display of the images allowed the family to be reconstructed. Here Ike can be seen with his second wife, with Donnas — his older daughter from his first marriage — and his three younger children from his second marriage (fig 9). The warmth in the expressions of Donnas and her little brother lighten the impression of the more sombre images of their parents.

The desire to reassemble families by reorganising the photographs was common. In the conversations during the 'Back to Brewarrina' weekend, many people talked over who was related to whom and drew broader, extended kin relationships between the people in the photographs and the people living in communities today. Gaynor Macdonald's work is a valuable insight into how photographs have become a part of sustaining kin relationships and indeed, of reinforcing them against the pressures of contemporary lives which threaten to stretch them to breaking point.²⁴ The collective display allowed a rich opportunity to teach and learn about the complex relationships of family, marriage and extended affiliation in a similar way to other sites of lived community experience which engage with memory, such as the Collarenebri Cemetery.²⁵ The cemetery offers something similar because families go to such lengths to bring people 'home' to be buried, so learning the names and stories of those buried there allows an understanding of the relationship of family to place. There are some outsiders buried there, and the position of their graves suggests a great deal about the nature of relationships past and present, but the cemetery nevertheless includes only those outsiders whose death in Collarenebri was so lonely that no family could take them away to another home, and so the Collarenebri Aboriginal community claimed them and drew them in.

However, the observation that Aboriginal people have been seeking primarily to recreate social relationships which echo tradition, like kinship, is not the only way to understand how people create a sense of historical meaning for themselves. Jeremy Beckett argues that Myles Lalor, for example, rejects the expectation that he will tie his life to the meaning inherent in places, and particularly those of his birth country. Instead, Beckett argues, Myles Lalor takes up the challenge of his life lived in many places and makes them meaningful by the stories he recounts of them.²⁶ His autobiographical 'oral history' uses places as the structuring framework for his narratives, but he generates their meaning out of the relationships he has in them, not by references to an established tradition of meanings and law for the place itself.

24. Macdonald 2003.

25. Goodall 2001: 72–96.

26. Beckett 1996: 312–322.



Fig 9: Ike Handy and his family, including his daughter Donnas, lower right. Image: South Australian Museum Tindale archive and UTS Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre

The recognition of historical process, and the active role of Aboriginal people as history makers in building links between people and between people and places, is made possible in the case of the Tindale archive because of the collective nature of its repatriation. It shows the images of all those people taken at the same time, shoved together by a combination of Depression economy and Protection Board policy. When the collection is worked on through the community approach of building links over time between the living present and the past, this offered a view of even broader networks, of peer groups defined by generation, gender and child-rearing age who lived together at the settlement despite coming from different families, different locations and different languages. As individual images, the photographs from the archive offer the capacity for tracing biological and classificatory kin over time and space. But shown together, the archive allows something else: the tracing of the powerful networks forged in the shared experiences, hardships and enjoyments of historical change over recent generations. Some of these became family networks, as some of the children — Angledool's Sylvia and Mona Fernando for example — grew up to marry people with whom they had shared a childhood in Brewarrina. So families who would later become in-laws can be seen as the new arrivals would have first seen them. Others, however, never become part of the kinship network but their lives were nevertheless locked into those of the other mission residents by the events they went through together because

of the Protection Board's policies. The choice of 'Karoo : Mates' as the title for the booklet makes real sense in this light. The images allow an understanding not only of kin networks but of the shared histories which bind the north-western communities together even more broadly.

Conclusion

Since the 'Back To Brewarrina' weekend in 1994, Roy and June Barker have strengthened their use of photographs to consolidate and extend this ongoing community conversation about both kin and mates. They have moved to Lightning Ridge where they operate a small cultural museum at the front of their long residential block, in which some beautifully presented displays of photographs and other material items of community significance can be found. They are, however, enthusiastically focused on being mobile and sustaining the links between the families and communities now spread between the half-dozen key townships in the area.

Roy and June can be found whenever there is any community event, such as the Music Festival at Brewarrina in the later 1990s in which I caught up with their travelling community stories display. They have arranged Tindale photographs from Brewarrina and the other key town-

ships at which they were taken, with others found in the archives and in family collections, on large display boards which allow detailed annotations to be fixed next to and sometimes inscribed onto the copied photographs. The large displays invite people in to look at them and chat, and there are always many people absorbed in exploring the images closely and talking with others around them about who they have found in the pictures (fig 10). Roy and June continue to work from the 'Karoo : Mates' book, taking it with them on their regular visits to *Yetta*, the low-security prison established near Brewarrina to allow Aboriginal people serving jail sentences to do so in a rural area not too far from home. This book, June feels, allows people to find their ancestors and their histories and so to work on the way they are connected to the past and the present.²⁷ Roy and June have taken the reclaiming process further than a static publication. As they and Joey Flick had hoped when they brought the collection back home, the images



Fig 10: Community members closely exploring the photographs at Roy and June Barker's display of community photographs, Brewarrina, 1996. Photo: the author.

²⁷. June Barker, personal communication, 19 April 2006.

are now at the centre of a constantly stimulated network of conversations and interactions across the region.

Joey Flick has continued to research images and to develop ways of working collaboratively with communities to allow the stories which images tell to become revitalised through contact with their communities. He has had a particular role in relation to precious images which relate to the Quambone community, whose people were shifted to Brewarrina in 1934 but many of whom have returned to their Weilwan country. His careful role in researching with the community their knowledge of and feelings about photographs taken at the public parts of a ceremony in 1898 was an essential first step in allowing the photographs to be used respectfully and in accordance with the community's wishes. In a moving and sensitive book, the results of that research are now available online, in a simple publication which reflects the strong support of the Quambone community.²⁸ Through the *collectively-focused* work of Roy and June Barker and of Joey Flick, not only have the extended and interlocking communities of the north-west been offered a body of resources under their control, but they have become active partners in the ongoing work of reclaiming and reinterpreting those images, linking them in once again to the lives and futures of their people.

On reflection over the three possible ways, among many, in which the Brewarrina photographs might be read, the collective nature of the images in the Tindale archive has been the key to its most fruitful reclaiming. It is a collection of photographs of kin but, just as importantly, of the broader concept understood as *mates*. It is not only traditional or even biological kinship which has generated the most complex and active readings, it has been the historical and lived experiences which these people had shared and which continue to link their descendants. The photographs speak not only for themselves but to each other, and so when clustered together they tell a different story from the story they tell when they are individualised.

There is an important parallel here with documentary archives, held in both Commonwealth and State archive offices. It suggests the problems of narrowing access to image or documentary archives down to direct family, as has been the practice over many years now for State government controls over various collecting institutions, such as the New South Wales State Archives in which Aborigines Protection Board and Welfare Board records are housed. There is no question that the notes and particularly the genealogies in the Tindale archive are flawed, but that is a reality which is best addressed by strong and active accompanying educational programs, generated with community involvement, about the conditions of creation of the records and about how to read all archives critically. The embarrassment of reading negative 'welfare' assessments of people's character and behaviour is, once again, best addressed by strongly supportive and community-engaged educational programs which identify the political advantages gained by government officials in the cultural politics of colonial control, coming right down to the present.

The uneasy suspicion to be read in the faces of those people photographed in the Tindale survey has been softened and moderated by their reclamation and repositioning as 'Karoo : Mates' within the living communities in the north-west. By the same

28. Steve Miller [Education Officer, Aboriginal Projects] 1999, *Sharing a Weilwan story*.

process, alongside their technical, formal historical and aesthetic readings, other forms of documentary records might be open to constructive and creative reinterpretation. The 'Karoo : Mates' images and archives tell stronger and more 'alive' stories if they are able to be considered both individually and collectively. They belong, in the most productive way, not only to direct kin but also to their wider community of *mates*.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for the assistance and inspiration of the great researchers who brought the Brewarrina photographs home and created the 'Karoo : Mates' book — Roy and June Barker, George Rose Snr and Joey Flick. I have been greatly assisted also by the valuable comments of the anonymous reviewers for this journal, which have allowed the article to be developed more fully.

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Tracks

She went to the archive stretched out in the land
Followed their tracks
Followed their scents nipping in the wind
Followed a canvas sniffing out the paint.

She sent out the brushstrokes to become picture words
Reeling in acrylic memory
Reeling in encounters with testimony
Reeling in the sites of her aunties' significances.

She called out to the images against the grain
Installed in galleries, libraries, town halls
Murals and tracks and scents and canvas
And mouths, and songs and steps
And gestures, she danced.

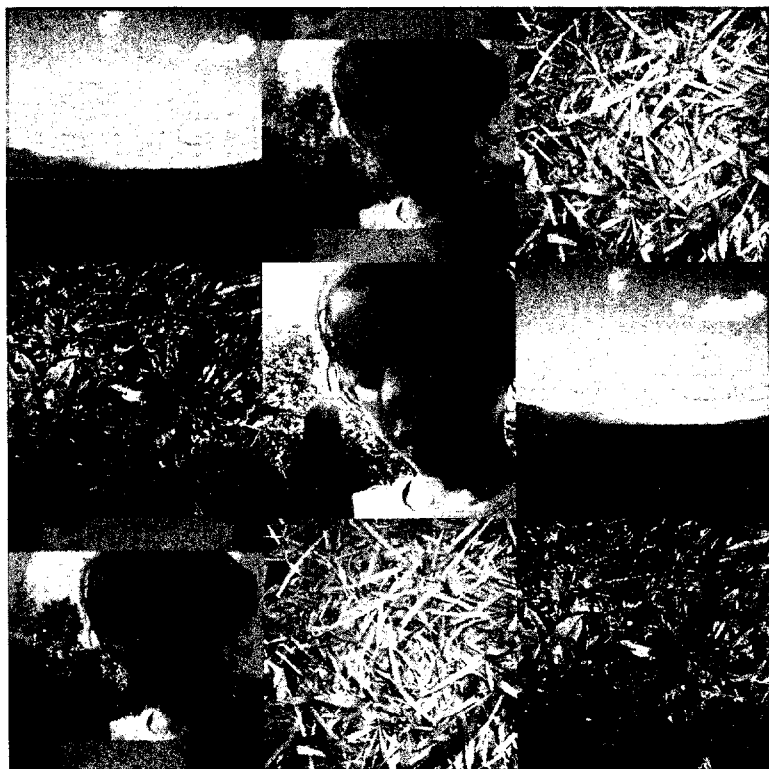
She called out here comes the butterfly
Lamenting the suffering of the
Koori song, Murri Song, Warlpiri song, Kimberly
song,
Mekeo song, Man song,
Woman song, Human song,

She danced the revisions of her story
In layers upon layers
Of the red earth
Yellow earth, brown earth and white clay.

June Perkins



Walking childhood.
June Perkins 2005



Reading the archives. June Perkins 2005

These images are part of a collection created for an online exhibition 'Archives in the land' in 2005, using Picasa, merging and patchworking photographs.

Aboriginality in the city: re-reading Koorie photographs

Sylvia Kleinert

During the 1930s and 1940s dramatic changes occurred in the lives of Koories in the settled south-east of Australia when they left behind remote reserves and moved into towns and cities. Within assimilation rhetoric this progressive urbanisation was viewed positively as the outcome of people's desire to escape rural isolation and become part of the wider Australian community but more recently the category of the 'urban Aborigine' has come to be seen as 'historically and politically volatile'.¹ Aboriginal urbanisation — whether by choice or under duress — entailed risks and required new strategies of survival. Although government administrators and humanitarians believed that Aboriginal people deserved equal rights it was assumed that the Aboriginality of many Koories had been erased in the process of colonisation. Urbanisation further threatened to erase a Koorie presence.

In this article I take up these issues in relation to Koorie photographs in Melbourne during the era of 'high assimilation' from the late 1930s to 1970. In retrieving recognition for a dynamic and resilient Koorie presence in Melbourne my analysis is not intended to diminish or overlook the forces of domination and repression at work in colonial power relationships. Rather, by examining these photographic images within a particular historical context and the various registers in which they can be understood in relation to constructions of cultural identity and self-fashioning by metropolitan minorities, this paper explores the importance of the photographic genre in the formation of a 'vernacular modernism'. In so doing my paper highlights the gap between the rhetoric of assimilation policies and the reality of Koorie life and society at a time when relations between Koories and the wider community were often starkly polarised and Koories were engaged in political struggles to strengthen the status and well-being of their people.

Since colonisation, many hundreds and thousands of photographic images have resulted from the lenses of European photographers. In seeking to reconsider the photographic medium within contemporary debates on colonialism, race and representation, attention has focused on the insights of writers such as Edward Said and Michael Foucault. They tend to construct photographic imagery and practice as a set of authoritative and essentialising 'truths' that simplistically represent Indigenous

¹. Rowse 2000.

people through the West's discursive strategies of power and knowledge.² For many writers, photography's 'distancing, objectifying mode of perception constitutes an inherent feature of modern "scopic regimes" making [it] an ideal tool of surveillance and control'.³ Indeed there are many instances where the photographic images of sub-altern groups often seem to be resistant to Indigenous interpretations 'irrevocably marked by the exploitation sanctioned by invasion'.⁴ For example Roslyn Poignant's study of the group of the nine Aboriginal men removed from Palm Island and Hinchinbrook Island in Queensland and taken overseas for display with PT Barnum's circus tracks the incorporation of these subjects within racial stereotypes.⁵ Indigenous curator Michael Aird in his 1993 exhibition *Portraits of the Elders* found he could not include the 1930s portrait of Andrew Ball, a resident of Cherbourg settlement in the south-east Queensland because his frontal and profile portraits embodied such oppression.⁶ Similar photographs appeared in Melbourne's *Argus* newspaper in 1934 recording a scientific project undertaken at Lake Tyers Aboriginal settlement in Victoria by a group of scholars from Melbourne University aimed at documenting 'The Vanishing Aborigine'.⁷ In arguing that the photograph is a 'mode of production' operating within 'more or less coherent systems of ideas and representations [as] an apparatus of ideological control' John Tagg articulates a view of photography that is determined in hegemonic terms in relation to the power and ideology of the nation state.⁸

Nevertheless there is a danger that in arguing for the authority of photographic images we lose sight of the many complex factors at work in cross-cultural representations generally: the dynamics of the historical encounter, the conditions of production and reception and the willing participation of Indigenous subjects creating the possibility for many and varied readings.⁹ Just as the project of colonialism itself is now seen as inherently flawed and problematic, so too, photography is understood to allow more diverse and varied interpretations than previously acknowledged. Where previous commentators have read photography's indexical relation to reality as evidence of 'closure and fixity', Christopher Pinney finds that 'the inability of the lens to discriminate ensures a ... margin of excess ... in every photographic image'.¹⁰ Roland Barthes' semi-otic analysis of the photographic image points out that 'all images are polysemous' implying 'a floating chain of signifieds' allowing the reader to 'choose some and ignore others'.¹¹ Substantive research in historical collections and the perspective provided by Indigenous histories indicate that Aboriginal people have willingly engaged in photographic practices for their own purposes.¹² In particular I draw on recent studies by Jane Lydon, Michael Aird and Gaynor Macdonald. Lydon's in-depth study of the photographic images commissioned at the Coranderrk Aboriginal station on the

2. Pinney 2003a: 2.

3. Lydon 2005: 2.

4. Lydon 2005: 3.

5. Poignant 1997.

6. Aird 2003: 27.

7. *Argus*, 28 February 1934: 5.

8. Tagg 1984: 123.

9. Bell 1999; Pinney 2003a; Lydon 2005; McBryde 1985.

10. Pinney 2003a: 6.

11. Barthes 1982: 39.

12. McBryde 1985; Poignant 1996; Stephen 2000; Lydon 2002, 2005.

outskirts Melbourne in the late nineteenth century demonstrates that photography became:

a powerful visual language ... shaped through a process of exchange between black and white [and through the circulation of images in] the mass media of the press and commercial photography. ... A crucial aspect of the resident's political savvy and their ability to manipulate public debate ... was their self-conscious understanding of how they were represented in white discourse.¹³

From this model Lydon suggests that it is possible to recover a performative relationship between the photographic image and Aboriginal subjects, one that allows archival images, postcards and media images to be reinterpreted from an Indigenous perspective. Generally it seems Indigenous people simply ignore or even undermine the interpretations of photographs provided by critics of colonialism and postmodernism.¹⁴ Michael Aird's 1993 exhibition *Portraits of our Elders* comprised Aboriginal portraits from the 1860s to the 1920s. Recalling his response to the exhibition Aird says, 'I have ... often seen Aboriginal people look past the stereotypical way in which their relatives and ancestors have been portrayed, because they are just happy to be able to see photographs of people who play a part in their family's history'.¹⁵ Similarly anthropologist Gaynor Macdonald has found that collections of family snapshots are among 'the most prized and jealously guarded of all Wiradjuri Aboriginal "material" possessions'.¹⁶ Most particularly for Aboriginal people like the Wiradjuri who have been excluded from the mythical traditions of Aboriginality and erased from colonial history, family photographs fulfil multiple roles: a means of strengthening the continuity of family ties, an affirmation of Aboriginal identity and a means of negotiating sociality through time and space by validating the past.¹⁷ Building on these insights Christopher Pinney has argued that the Indigenous appropriation of photographic genre in postcolonial settings in the formation of a 'vernacular modernism' departs from the previous emphasis on objective documentary to 'project a materiality of the surface' and a concern with a 'tactile relationship with the viewer'.¹⁸

If, as Indigenous academic Marcia Langton has observed, 'Aboriginality ... is a field of intersubjectivity ... that is remade over and over again in the process of dialogue, of imagination, of representation, and interpretation'¹⁹ between Aborigines and non-Aborigines, then we need to understand the role played by photography in the construction of individual and community identities. In colonial contexts these identities will necessarily be contingent and contested. As cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues, identity 'is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation.'²⁰

13. Lydon 2005: xiii; Lydon 2002: 82.

14. Macdonald 2003: 227.

15. Aird 2003: 25.

16. Macdonald 2003; see also Somerville et. al. 1994; Aird 1993.

17. Macdonald 2003: 225.

18. Pinney 2003b.

19. Langton 1993: 33.

20. Hall, 1990: 225.

The historical context for the Koories with whom I am concerned lies in the generations of oppression and discrimination experienced by Koories at the hand of colonial governments. Historians Peter Read, Heather Goodall and Bain Attwood have documented in depth the Aboriginal history of Koorie communities in the south-eastern Australia.²¹ Until recently assimilation has been understood in relation to the progressive implementation of federal government policies between the late 1930s and 1970s but from the viewpoint of Aboriginal history, government policies conceived as part of the effort to transform Indigenous Australians are better seen as part of a collective Indigenous experience of colonisation.²² In the late nineteenth century governments took the first official forays into assimilation with the Aboriginal Protection Acts of 1869 and 1886 and the Aborigines Act of 1890. By means of this legislation Aborigines of mixed-descent were expected to be absorbed into the wider community while the doomed remnant 'full-blood' populations remained on reserves. The intent to break up Koorie communities — seen as genocide by some commentators — was implemented through the progressive closure of reserves, and, if necessary, the removal of children. In the 1940s a further strategy aimed at breaking up existing communities targeted the independent camps established by Koories, such as those at Toorloo Arm and Jackson's Track in Victoria, and on the Murray River. The opportunity for housing in nearby towns was used to lure Koories into abandoning their own communities.

Jackson's Track

Jackson's Track was a timber-milling settlement near Drouin in Victoria established by Daryl Tonkin and his brother Harry in the late 1930s. Employment provided by the mill supported an independent Koorie community. In his recently published memoirs Daryl Tonkin vividly recalls the freedom and independence which prevailed at Jackson's Track, where Koories lived with a greater degree of autonomy than was possible on government reserves. Life at Jackson's Track proceeded on the basis of an Aboriginal sociality grounded in connections to kin, in the spiritual beliefs associated with *bugeens*, *mrartchets* (ghosts), and *dooligahs*, living in sturdily built bush huts (fig 1) utilising and sharing the resources of the land.²³ Most Sundays, Pastor Doug Nicholls visited Jackson's Track for a church service bringing 'city blackfellas' with him (fig 2) and every year Nicholls organised a Christmas party for the children. For Koories with connections to Jackson's Track, the photographs taken by Richard Seeger, a photographer with the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works and a member of the congregation at Doug Nicholl's Gore St Church of Christ in Fitzroy, hold great significance. As Aird points out, photographic collections by white Australians with close connections to Koorie communities are important because they document the daily life of Koories and relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.²⁴ On a more personal note Macdonald observes that Koorie photos are about people:

photos bring people who are not present ... into the co-present, into relationship. But the photo also places them in time and place ... Most of all, Kooris' photos are

21. Read 1988; Goodall 1996; Attwood 1989, 2003; Attwood and Marcus 2004.

22. Rowse 2005a: 3–4.

23. Tonkin and Landon 1999: 42, 224–6, 239.

24. Aird 2003: 30



Fig 1: Two houses on Jackson's Track, Victoria, c.1950–1959. Photographed by Richard Seeger, XP1627. Reproduced courtesy of Museum Victoria.

about people, a form of connectedness, used as a mnemonic of kin-relatedness, sometimes of events but more often people.²⁵

Seeger's photographs are usually of family groups — seldom of individuals.²⁶ Photographs are a form of cultural capital in Koorie communities. Aware of their value, Seeger printed copies of his photographs for everyone concerned.²⁷ Yet shifts in assimilation policy saw the closure of this independent Koorie settlement targeted by shire authorities and church members who sought to 'clean up' 'the black problem' out on Jackson's Track. Koories' clean and well-kept bush homes were destroyed: bulldozed and burnt.²⁸ In the face of this erasure, Seeger's photographs provide a focus for mem-

25. Macdonald 2003: 234.

26. Macdonald 2003: 235.

27. Jackomos, letter to the author, 15 May 1992.



Fig 2: Pastor Doug Nicholls leading a broadcast of hymns on Jackson's Track, Victoria, c. 1947–1960, Photographed by Richard Seeger, XP1640. Reproduced courtesy of Museum Victoria and the Nicholls family.

ory, verifying the web of connectedness linking people and place. In Barthes' analysis the photograph establishes 'a new space-time category,' an awareness of '*having-been-there*'.²⁹ The photograph is therefore a reconstitution of the past:

at once the past and the real. The Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no longer*, but only and for certain *what has been*. This distinction is decisive. In front of a photograph, our consciousness does not necessarily take the nostalgic path of memory ... but the path of certainty: the Photograph's essence is to ratify what it represents.³⁰

28. Tonkin and Landon 1999: 253.

29. Barthes 1982: 44 (emphasis in the original).

30. Barthes 1981: 85.

These photographs continue to be valued by those Koories with associations to Jackson's Track. Although Jackson's Track no longer exists, the photographs provide confirmation that it was there.³¹ It is confirmation of a Koorie presence otherwise erased from recognition.

A Koorie history emerges from these photographs. In the late nineteenth century Koories regularly used petitions to protest against their treatment at the hands of colonial administration. This history of protest first emerged at Coranderrk Aboriginal station established in 1863 by the lay preacher John Green when Kulin men, under the leadership of *ngurungaeta* or headman Simon Wonga and later William Barak, walked the 60 kilometres to Melbourne to petition colonial officials and present gifts — actions in keeping with their own well-established traditions of exchange relations.³² At Maloga mission station on the Murray River established by Daniel and Janet Matthews, Pangerang and Yorta Yorta also petitioned the governor of New South Wales for land. This tradition of protest became the precursor to the political organisations formed in the 1920s and 1930s — sometimes with white support, as in the Australian Aborigines' League co-founded by William Cooper and Arthur Burdeau, and sometimes independently in alliance with international organisations such as the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association led by Fred Maynard.³³ Although regionally based these organisations worked on a national front: in 1933 William Cooper, one of Daniel Matthew's converts, drafted a petition to King George VI in 1933 and it was Cooper who conceived of the highly symbolic Day of Mourning held in Sydney on 26 January 1938 in protest against the sesqui-centenary celebrations of European colonisation.³⁴ In the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s Koorie activism addressed two key issues. First, they protested against the forcible dispersal on and off reserves, the ever-present fear of child removal and the gradual loss of civil rights. Second, on a broader national front, William Cooper specifically rejected policies of assimilation based on the absorption of 'half castes' into the white majority.³⁵ Arguing for a new pan-Aboriginality he called upon white Australians to 'think black'.³⁶

The problem was that Koories were invisible. With colonisation Koories suffered a traumatic break with the past. As Macdonald points out:

Until recent decades, the notion of a [Koorie] past has been represented and experienced as loss — of land, people and culture. Temporalised as belonging to a former, primitive or traditional culture which no longer existed, they were seen as the cultureless.³⁷

In 1981 Indigenous academic Marcia Langton criticised this 'culture of poverty' approach as an ideological deception created by anthropologists, arguing instead that urban Aborigines see themselves as adaptable and resilient.³⁸ Meanwhile these cultural

31. MacDonald 2003: 237.

32. McBryde 1984.

33. Maynard 2005: 16, 20.

34. Attwood and Markus 2004: 58-64.

35. Attwood 2003: 68.

36. Attwood 2003: 63.

37. MacDonald 2003: 238.

38. Langton 1981.

constructions of race contributed to a 'politics of visibility', which allowed the evidence for a dynamic and resilient Koori culture in south-east Australia to be rendered invisible.³⁹ The anthropologist Dianne Barwick in the 1960s was among the first to redress these oversights. In her doctoral thesis Barwick demonstrated that 'the dark people of Melbourne' or Kuris as they referred to themselves, retained their regional affiliations to reserves and their wider connections with an extended family.⁴⁰ Most importantly Barwick challenged ideas of tradition arguing that traditions are never static: they encompass both continuity and change.⁴¹

Dramatic changes occurred when Koories moved into the city, under varying degrees of choice or coercion. Until the 1930s Koories were generally excluded from towns and cities. As Paul Carter has pointed out, imperial history occurs within 'spatial and conceptual coordinates': the city was a focus of power and a contested site of the colonial imaginary.⁴² Once in the city Koories found that they had to develop new strategies of survival. While the outbreak of World War II provided new opportunities for employment and forged new alliances with Koories from other regional communities, at the same time Koories found themselves crowded into inner-city tenements with few places to meet except the houses of families and friends and excluded from the convivial atmosphere provided by hotels. Following customary traditions of sociality, Koories tended to congregate in public parks and spaces where they came to the attention of police resulting in escalating rates of incarceration for Aboriginal men.⁴³ But the city also offered new opportunities, potential sites for cross-cultural exchange which could be exploited by Koorie leaders to gain attention for their Aboriginal cause. For example, Doug Nicholls, a protégé of William Cooper and a participant in the Day of Mourning who played a leading role in the church and social welfare, utilized the space of the Yarra Bank to speak on behalf of his people.

A metropolitan marriage

A photograph of the mid-war marriage of Susie Murray and George Patten at Melbourne's prestigious Ormond Road Baptist Church⁴⁴ (fig 3) is remarkable for the rich insights it provides into the life stories of key figures in the Melbourne Koorie community. As I have shown, through well-established traditions of exchange relations Koories understood the importance of rituals of diplomacy in the negotiation of inter-relationships. Over many years Kulin at Coranderrk, exploiting their close proximity to Melbourne, gained renown as brilliant diplomats, enabling them to assert ownership of Coranderrk.⁴⁵ Staging Aboriginality through public performances — even within the constraints imposed by assimilation policies — fulfilled an important role. Bringing Indigenous performers and audience participants together created a context for the possible renegotiation of identities. Victor Turner, writing about the transformative potential of cultural performances, suggests that they take place in liminal zones out-

39. Neale 2000: 271.

40. Barwick 1964, 1972, 1973.

41. Atwood 2003: 250.

42. Carter 1987: 46.

43. Rowse 2000.

44. Jackomos and Fowell 1991: 97.

45. Lydon 2002; Attwood 2003: 3–30.



Fig 3: The wedding of Susie Murray and George Patten, 1940. Image courtesy of Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Alick Jackomos Collection (image number N3747.08a). Reproduced courtesy of Herbie Patten.

side the discrete frame allotted to ritual life yet separate from the quotidian world of the everyday.⁴⁶ Viewed as a form of social and symbolic action these cultural performances are seen to be 'reciprocal and reflexive' offering Indigenous performers and their audience participants an opportunity for a critique of social life.⁴⁷

It seems that every aspect of this marriage ceremony from the elaborate wedding gown and the military guard of honour to the arch of boomerangs is the result of meticulously planning — part of a deliberate strategy aimed at capturing the attention of the wider community. The strategy was spectacularly successful. A photograph of the wedding appeared in the *Argus* on 23 September 1940. Under the caption, 'Arch of Boomerangs: A Aboriginal Wedding', the anonymous reporter described the wedding in glowing terms:

A wedding between two members of the aboriginal race of Australia will take place this afternoon at the Ormond Baptist Church. The bridegroom is Mr George Patten, a well-known speaker on aboriginal life, and his bride is Miss Susie Evelyn Murray who was born at Lake Tyers.

The bride's veil, which is almost a hundred years old, is being lent by Rev. W McEwan, and Mrs and Mrs Keith Holland, who take a great interest in aboriginal welfare, will give the young people a wedding breakfast. Mr Doug Nicholls the former Fitzroy footballer will be best man and members of aboriginal families in the AIF will form a guard of honour at the church making an arch with boomerangs through which the bride and groom will pass.⁴⁸

The paternalistic tone of the article neatly captures the idealism of colonial rhetoric. The wedding is taken as symbol of successful assimilation: George Patten is commended for his scholarly pursuits, Susie Murray's connection with the Aboriginal reserve of Lake Tyers legitimates her Aboriginal status while the best man, Doug Nicholls, is introduced via his achievements on the sporting field — one of the key means by which Aborigines were able to negotiate racial discrimination and achieve a degree of equality.⁴⁹ Following European traditions Susie Murray is dressed in white, she carries a bouquet of flowers and confetti showers the smiling bride and groom who walk beneath the arch of honour surrounded by family, friends and the wider church community.

However, the account provided by the *Age* differs markedly from the reality of Koorie lives, serving to mask both the level of political activism in which these Koories were engaged and the ongoing discrimination and opposition they endured. The Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira was likewise celebrated for his successful assimilation but the tragic circumstances surrounding his imprisonment and death highlight the contradictions between assimilation policies and the lived reality of Aboriginal people. The charismatic George Patten played a leading role in Koorie political struggles for equality and recognition. The previous year George Patten and his brother Jack, who participated in the Day of Mourning in Sydney, had led a walk-off from Cummeragunja reserve in New South Wales. This was the culmination of long-standing

46. Turner 1986: 22.

47. Turner 1986: 22; Myers 1994: 679.

48. 'Arch of Boomerangs: A Aboriginal Wedding,' *Argus*, 23 September 1940: 9.

49. Broome 1980.

grievances against deteriorating conditions on the reserve, the forcible removal of children and the victimisation of Koories at the hands of a brutal manager.⁵⁰ Gunai / Kurnai in Gippsland were also caught up in the collective experience of dispersal and discrimination. Although Susie Murray was born on Lake Tyers, her family were excluded by discriminatory legislation and forced to move to the nearby fringe camp of Toorloo Arm. Doug Nicholls had indeed come to national attention through his sporting prowess but, as we have seen, he was also a leading figure in the Koorie community through his involvement with Aboriginal organisations, the church and social welfare.⁵¹

As Barthes observes, 'Every photograph is a certificate of presence ... The reading of public photographs is always, at bottom, a private reading'.⁵² Over time, the context for this photograph has shifted from the public domain to the world of individual and communal memories. Today each of the eight children born to George and Susie Patten treasure their own personal copies of this photograph as a record of their parents' wedding. Photographs enable us to believe in the past and they verify our contemporary presence. As Macdonald has shown, in Koorie families photographs are 'used to tell ... stories, introduce people to kin, as items of exchange and as important statements of identity and belonging in the spatial and temporal politics of kinship'.⁵³ When I read this photograph my eye is drawn to the *punctum*⁵⁴ — the visual 'accident' that is poignant to me — in this case the cheeky face of the bridesmaid (whom I have not yet been able to identify), peeking excitedly between the bride and groom, looking directly at the camera.

For Herbie Patten this photograph resonates with personal meaning as a symbol of the respectability which his mother Susie Murray held very dear.⁵⁵ In a colonial context Christianity fulfilled both a protective and pastoral role that involved civilising and conversion.⁵⁶ Bain Attwood's meticulous study of Ramahyuck mission in Victoria has demonstrated that Indigenous identity was historically created and mediated through interaction with missionaries who sought to inculcate the spiritual values which shaped consciousness through a temporal and material ordering of daily existence.⁵⁷ Nevertheless as Jean and John Comaroff point out in their study of Christian missions in South Africa, Christianity is never a discrete set of beliefs but a contested realm between consciousness and ideology: conversion 'belied the fact that older modes of thought and action were never fully laid aside'.⁵⁸ It follows that Christianity did not necessarily erase Aboriginal culture nor the political commitment to Aboriginal restitution and recognition.⁵⁹ Attwood points out that through Christian missions Koories 'learned humanitarian and liberal political precepts which gave them the means to publicise

50. Barwick 1972; Goodall 1996: 247-258; Attwood 2003: 31-53.

51. Clark 1975; Horton 1994: 792-3.

52. Barthes 1981: 87, 97.

53. MacDonald 2003: 225.

54. Barthes 1981: 27.

55. Herbie Patten, personal communication, 11 August 2006.

56. Rose and Swain 1988: 1-8.

57. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 78; Attwood 1989.

58. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 247.

59. Rose and Swain 1988: 1-8.

their plight'.⁶⁰ Most particularly the evangelical work of men like lay preacher John Green at Coranderrk and Daniel Mathews from the Maloga mission on the Murray River provided Koories with a powerful tool that equipped them in political struggles for recognition. Christian teachings proclaimed the equality of all in the eyes of God, regardless of race; they appealed to God as a higher authority, they helped Koories formulate a strong sense of themselves as people with the promise of deliverance as God's children through 'a prophetic and predictive' sense of history providing the hope of salvation and they introduced the idea of British democracy and their rights and equality as citizens within British justice.⁶¹ It deserves mention however that the colonial government failed to grant political recognition except on the basis of a Christianised Aboriginality.

Respectability and gender

Historian Tim Rowse suggests that over time, Koories found an honourable means of establishing status and respect within the constraints imposed by a colonial regime as a survival strategy.⁶² But the issue of respectability raises gender issues. As the hub of Aboriginal families, women would inevitably be a focus of attention for government authorities and humanitarians. In her research on Koorie history, Barwick reported that, as result of mission influences and the changing structure of Aboriginal society Koorie women had gained considerable equality and autonomy. The ladies 'most eagerly attended' embroidery and dressmaking classes and with the money earned from their industry Coranderrk women 'dressed with remarkable elegance' such that visitors 'repeatedly commented that their homes and furnishings were equal ... to those of "English workingmen" and superior to those of many small farmers in the district'.⁶³ Elsewhere Barwick describes the intimacy and 'genuine camaraderie' that prevailed in the relationships between Koorie women and missionaries' wives at Acheron and Coranderrk. However Barwick's descriptions are in marked contrast to the picture of gender relations elsewhere on the frontier. Indeed 'any claim of a "sisterhood" between white women and Aboriginal women is historically discredited by the cruelty, violence and racism experienced by many Aboriginal women at the hands of white women'.⁶⁴ It may well be that the historical context in which Barwick worked within emerging feminist ideologies led her to exaggerate the level of Indigenous transformation. In response to these debates Lydon suggests that the gender relationships between missionaries' wives and Aboriginal women may have been more complex than Barwick realised: while associations between Aboriginal women and white women might involve 'companionship and cooperation', white women also operated as 'agents of colonial control'.⁶⁵ And we need to remember that the church also lent support for the removal of children from their families, forced marriage and the break-up of communities.⁶⁶

60. Attwood 2004: 6.

61. Attwood 2003: 28.

62. Rowse 2005b: 50.

63. Barwick 1974, 1972: 27-28; 34.

64. Paisley 1997: 114.

65. Lydon 2005: 207.

66. Attwood 1989: 39-40, 55-56; Lydon 2005: 210; Tonkin and Landon 1999: 121.

Nevertheless we do not have to concur completely with Barwick's representation of gender relationships in order to acknowledge the emergence of a matriarchal structure within Koorie society. With men away at work, women were responsible for the protection of children and processes of socialisation, women enjoyed equal importance in new ceremonies of weddings, christenings and funerals and 'eagerly accepted new leadership roles as choir members and organists'.⁶⁷ Mapping Barwick's insights onto a Melbourne demographic of the 1940s, Rowse emphasizes the importance of public Aboriginal activities and private family celebrations to promote community solidarity and as a form of social control. Dances, anniversaries and weddings were highly valued as forms of conspicuous consumption among the Cummeragunja community and great pride and respect was given to their appearance and clothing and their good behaviour: 'Organised ... [c]oncert parties, fund-raising dances, work bees and church suppers, barbecues and protest meetings [served] to demonstrate aboriginal skills and solidarity to whites and encourage a sense of community membership among the participants'.⁶⁸ Above all, Koories said, these activities were intended to 'keep our people together' and to 'show those gabas what dark people can do'.⁶⁹

In her extended analysis of Christian weddings at Coranderrk, Lydon points that Koorie women commissioned photographs of their weddings as an essential souvenir, to recall the event and as proof of respectability within assimilation paradigms.⁷⁰ Aird would concur: with 'the confidence and dignity of people who have succeeded ... [Aborigines] felt a very real need to state their successes in the European community to ensure protection from the oppressive "protection" policies'.⁷¹ Thus the tradition of Aboriginal weddings fulfilled a complex role not just as an important social ritual but also as an expression of Aboriginal sentiment and association within the wider framework of a colonial context concerned with coercion and control.

At the same time the tactile quality of the photograph invokes the mimetic character of colonial contact. Pursuing this argument Michael Taussig suggests that modernity's concern with visuality is exemplified by the camera's mimetic impulse through the representation of alterity.⁷² Building on these debates Homi Bhabha examines the play of representations embodied in mimicry as a key strategy of the desire 'for a reformed recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite'.⁷³ As Lydon points out, these strategies reflect a fundamental colonial ambivalence demonstrating the instability and internal contradictions within colonial discourse.⁷⁴ But difference could also operate as a counter colonial strategy: in their political activities Doug Nicholls and activist and entrepreneur Bill Onus 'invoked difference ... as part of a strategy to gain the same rights as other Australians'.⁷⁵

67. Rowse 2005b: 55–6.

68. Barwick 1964: 29–30.

69. Barwick 1964: 30.

70. Lydon 2005: 209.

71. Aird 1993: vii.

72. Taussig 1993: 25.

73. Bhabha 1984: 126; see Rowse 2005a: 18 and 2005b: 54.

74. Lydon 2005: 7.

75. Attwood cited by Rowse 2005a: 18.

Aboriginal involvement in the Australian military forces

The photograph of the wedding of George Patten and Susie Murray is also crucially important because it documents a moment in time in the history of Aboriginal involvement in the Australian military forces. Historical photographs play a vital role in the recovery of these hidden histories and this photograph is reproduced in the book *Forgotten heroes* by Alick Jackomos and Derek Fowell.⁷⁶ With the outbreak of World War II, Aboriginal organisations seized the opportunity to press the government for citizenship rights. They drew attention to the anomaly that Aborigines could enlist and serve their country yet they were not citizens.⁷⁷ Koories who served in the war enjoyed positive gains in the form of better health and higher wages and they gained a temporary respite from the racism which prevailed in Australia. When hostilities ended however social relationships reverted back to their former state. Paralleling their experiences in World War I, soldiers found on their return that they were refused entry to hotels and denied status as returned servicemen. On this wedding day of celebration — and protest — no one could have foreseen that the 27 Lake Tyers men, from whom the guard of honour was drawn, who had so proudly volunteered for military service, would be discharged within a year. As far as the military was concerned, Aboriginal involvement in the war was 'neither necessary nor desirable'.⁷⁸ This was a reflection of their own deep-seated racism. Not surprisingly Koories returned to Lake Tyers disillusioned and angry.⁷⁹ In this context, the photograph is both poignant and powerful, capturing an occasion for celebration in the political struggles for equality and recognition, a euphoric moment that would soon be swept aside by the force of institutionalised racism.

In an innovative and highly original way, Koories appear to have capitalised on this unique historical moment by appropriating the pomp and status of military ceremonies and, substituting boomerangs for swords, created a synthesis between Indigenous and European traditions. In so doing Koories transformed European traditions in accordance with age-old practices. As Carol Cooper has pointed out, the heavy carved wooden weapons characteristic of the south-east had always fulfilled much more than an economic role, being of symbolic and spiritual significance in ceremonies as a signifier of individual and clan identity.⁸⁰ Boomerangs held aloft in ritual contexts figure in a Burbong initiation ceremony by Wailwan at Quambone Station New South Wales recorded by photographer Charles Kerry in 1898. Boomerangs feature in the corroborees depicted by the nineteenth century artists Tommy McRae and William Barak.⁸¹ Through well-established traditional exchange relations Kooris understood the importance of rituals of diplomacy in the negotiation of inter-relationships, and performance features in many accounts of cross-cultural exchange.⁸²

76. Jackomos and Fowell 1993.

77. Attwood and Marcus 2004: 22–23.

78. Hall 1997: 8.

79. Hall 1997: 20.

80. Cooper 1981: 32–33.

81. Stephen 2000: 251; Sayers 1994.

82. McBryde 1984; Clendinning 2003; White 1980; Lydon 2005.

Memorialising Barak

For Koories, boomerangs are an important part of regional heritage, while to members of the dominant culture the boomerang was a unique symbol of national identity.⁸³ In a highly original way the cultural performances staged by Koories mediate between these two apparently opposed realms. In the process they negotiate new roles and meanings for these artefacts emblematic of Koories' changing circumstances.

The circumstances surrounding the death of the William Barak, artist and *ngurun-gaeta* or head man for the Kulin people offer an example. During his lifetime William Barak played a key role in his community both as leader for his people in negotiations with the wider community, and as an artist gaining considerable recognition for his drawings of corroborees which drew on childhood memories from an earlier era.⁸⁴ Upon his death in 1903, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines unanimously decided that £20 should be put aside for a monument but the Chief Secretary refused to sanction this decision.⁸⁵ With the official closure of Coranderrk in 1924 and a growing concern with racial purity, Barak's legacy lapsed into obscurity. In 1934, to coincide with the Victorian Centenary, an official memorial was unveiled in nearby Healesville. This was achieved partly through a public subscription instigated by the *Argus* and the donation of a neo-classical Italian marble gravestone by the philanthropist, pastoralist and long time supporter of the Kulin, Anne Bon⁸⁶ (fig 4).

The monument was vandalised in the 1940s and stored by the local council until 1951 when members of the Bread and Cheese Club, a Melbourne literary society, held a working bee to restore the Coranderrk cemetery. Subsequently Barak's memorial was re-erected at the cemetery. I agree with Lydon's analysis of these events: that in the process of 'white forgetting and remembrance, these memorials stood for the death of a people', lending support to colonial myths of the noble savage that represented Barak as 'King Barak, the Last of the Victorian Aborigines'.⁸⁷ However an Aboriginal presence was not erased. Billie Russell, a senior member of the Coranderrk community and a descendent of Barak, was invited to be present at the official unveiling of the memorial on 29 May 1935. In the circumstance, we can assume that it was Russell's choice to hold two boomerangs aloft. To members of the dominant culture his presence may have served to reinforce the stereotypical notion of Koories as an atrophied remnant culture doomed to extinction. But for the Koorie community who maintained their ties to Coranderrk, the boomerang was symbolic of Barak's life, his ongoing presence in death and testimony to a continuing Koorie presence.

Contrasts can be drawn here with the metropolitan marriage of George Patten and Susie Murray. Whereas in the photograph of the official unveiling of Barak's memorial the lone figure of Billie Russell is subsumed within the pomp and power of colonial cultural heritage, in the Patten/Murray wedding, where Koories like Doug Nicholls played a key role in the arrangements, a greater degree of autonomy is evident. Boomerangs are pivotal to this performance: at the front of the arch a pair of heavy hunting

83. Jones 1992: 66.

84. Sayers 1994.

85. Kleinert 1994: 60.

86. Kleinert 1994: 61; Lydon 2005: 214-5.

87. Lydon 2005: 215.

strations of boomerang throwing and fire lighting and had the opportunity to purchase a boomerang, as a souvenir of their visit.⁸⁹ Although some residents at Coranderrk and Lake Tyers resented the intense curiosity and uncouth behaviour of tourists,⁹⁰ at Lake Tyers the income received from the production of artefacts (between 5 and 10 shillings for a boomerang) far exceeded the monthly wage paid by the manager. For many decades, managers at Lake Tyers tried unsuccessfully to reduce the hours that tourists were allowed to visit the reserve on the moral grounds that Gunai/Kurnai earned money too easily from the production of tourist artefacts.⁹¹ Managers tended to blame tourists for the growing discontent among 'inmates'. Like managers at Coranderrk⁹² they refused to acknowledge the growing historical consciousness of Koories and their ability to independently initiate acts of local resistance. By the 1950s managers' wishes were realised and tourists were excluded altogether.

As an innovative and highly original response to a local tourist industry, parallels exist between the Lake Tyers boomerangs and the painted artefacts produced by Arrernte at the Hermannsburg mission in the late 1930s. As Ian Burn and Ann Stephen argue the painted boomerangs and spearthrowers produced by Albert Namatjira and other Arrernte artists are structurally ambiguous, at once artefact and art object they resonate with multiple meanings expressive of a radically new context.⁹³ Similarly the painted boomerangs from Lake Tyers are hybrid objects simultaneously transposing traditional imagery into a new context and reappropriating images from the dominant culture. While there are historical and individual differences, it is possible to discern a number of discrete elements in the visual imagery on the Lake Tyers boomerangs: geometric clan designs once found on possum skin cloaks and dendroglyphs, paired birds on a leafy twig symbolising the Kurnai gender totems, *yiirung* (emu-wren), representing men and *djitgun* (superb wren) representing women and, at the apex of the boomerang, red and blue ensigns and the Australian coat of arms — expressive of Koories' political struggles for equality and recognition. In her study of tourism in Africa, Bennetta Jules-Rosette found that the meanings generated by tourist art follow a cyclic pattern: commodities embody particular values for the community concerned, in exchange they signal a further range of meanings and in turn, Indigenous producers respond to, and mirror, the expectations of consumers.⁹⁴ Thus the innovative artefacts produced by Gunai/Kurnai at Lake Tyers in response to the interests of tourists fulfilled multiple roles, entangled in the dialogue created by cross-cultural exchange and meaningful to both Koories and members of wider community on multiple levels.

Corroboree Season 1949

Art historian Ian McLean draws attention to the conscious shift in strategy which took place in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s as Aboriginal political struggles for equality and recognition began to adopt a deliberately cultural strategy.⁹⁵ At the same time the ideas of

89. Kleinert 1994: 105–135.

90. Pepper and Araugo 1985: 205; Lydon 2005: 178–9.

91. Kleinert 1994: 133–8.

92. Lydon 2002: 82.

93. Burn and Stephen 1992.

94. Jules-Rosette 1984: 225–6.

95. McLean 1998: 104.

the clergyman and anthropologist AP Elkin, who led the development and implementation of assimilation policies, reflected a shift in emphasis away from genetics towards cultural values.⁹⁶ In Aboriginal culture, performance fulfils a vital role as form of ritual diplomacy expressive of the formal relationships between various groups. In cross-cultural exchange the theatrical space of performance creates an opportunity for increased knowledge and understanding, even reciprocity. In the early twentieth century, the ethnographer AW Howitt commented favourably on the quality of mimicry, song and dance evident in the rituals he recorded.⁹⁷

Over time Koories found it impossible to maintain a full ceremonial life and corroborees were transformed into theatrical spectacles. At the level of everyday life, however, concerts fulfilled a central role in the activities of Koorie communities as 'a new kind of corroboree, a new kind of communal gathering'.⁹⁸ Margaret Tucker's minstrel singers from Cummeragunja performed for tourists on the Murray River and in fund-raising concerts in Melbourne while Doug Nicholls' weekly visits to Jackson's Track broadcast concerts on radio. The political nature of these concerts as cultural performances cannot be overlooked. On 24 January 1937 members of the Australian Aborigines League were invited to participate in the Australia Day celebration of John Batman's founding of Melbourne but they found Aboriginal people relegated to the realm of prehistory as the precursors to white settlement. Protesting their cause, on 31 May 1937, members of the Australian Aborigines League sponsored a concert at the Australian church in Russell Street, Melbourne thereby anticipating the Day of Mourning staged in Sydney the following year.⁹⁹

The series of Corroboree pageants sponsored by the Australian Aborigines League staged at Wirth's Olympia, Melbourne from 1948 onwards witnessed the transformation of a Koorie concert tradition into professional entertainment (fig 5). By the late 1940s, after a decade of political activism, Bill Onus, President of the Australian Aborigines League, came to the realisation that individual Aborigines such as Reg Saunders, the first commissioned Aboriginal officer; the artist Albert Namatjira; the actor Robert Tudawali — star of the film *Jedda* — and the singer Harold Blair who had achieved success in their own fields had the potential to change public opinion towards Aborigines. In the program for the *Corroboree Season 1949* Onus stated that 'For many years we have endeavoured to obtain full citizen rights for all aborigines throughout Australia but our pleas have been left unanswered'. Onus was convinced that 'the best way of [Aborigines] getting recognition was to present them culturally to the public'.¹⁰⁰ Billed as a 'weird, wild [and] picturesque' event *Corroboree Season 1949* promised an evening of 'tribal ritual dances, boomerang throwing, fire lighting, roping, whip cracking, gum leaf band, choir, comedians, vocalists and other novelties'. This extraordinary array of events drew upon Koories' diverse historical experiences from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, experience in the pastoral industry, on government reserves and popular culture.

⁹⁶. McGregor 2005.

⁹⁷. Howitt 1904: 423-4, 532-534.

⁹⁸. Clark 1975: 38.

⁹⁹. Atwood 2003: 71-74.

¹⁰⁰. *Corroboree Season 1949*, Wirth's Olympia, Melbourne, Lin Onus Collection.

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Fig 5: *Corroboree*, Wirth's Olympia, 1949, Collection Lin Onus, Reproduced courtesy of the Onus family.

By contrast with this evident hybridity, the poster advertising *Corroboree Season 1949* appropriated an image of classic Aboriginality drawn from the very popular *Walk-about* magazine, published from 1935 to 1974 by the National Travel Association with funds from the federal government to promote tourism within Australia. In recent years the construction of Aboriginality through colonial discourse as an essentialising stereotype of the noble savage has been widely critiqued. But in this context there can be no question of colonial domination. Rather the photograph of the central Australia tribal Aborigine must be seen as a form of 'strategic essentialism'¹⁰¹ – a deliberate and conscious use of an image immediately recognisable to both black and white Australians. The play of Aboriginalities evident in the presentation and performance of *Corroboree Season 1949* as an affirmation of both a distinctive regional identity and an emerging pan-Aboriginality points to the tensions which exist between more symbolic constructions of Aboriginality at the public level and the more situational and heterogeneous constructions of Aboriginality at the personal level.¹⁰²

An Aboriginal Moomba

In 1951 Doug Nicholls openly criticised the Melbourne City Council's exclusion of a Koorie presence from the nation's 50th anniversary celebrations: 'Our voice, long silent is now raised against the exclusion of Old Australians from the Jubilee celebrations'.¹⁰³ Nicholls threatened to call another day of mourning. He envisaged that this would be held on the banks of the Yarra River and would re-enact John Batman's signing of the treaty with local Aboriginal elders – a treaty which Koories held in high esteem as confirmation of their traditional ownership of land. One perceptive newspaper editor observed that Nicholl's proposal displayed 'an extraordinary sense of ritual'.¹⁰⁴ Nicholls further suggested that 'Aboriginal art could be represented by Albert Namatjira' and he proposed a 'boomerang throwing display' and a 'large corroboree'.¹⁰⁵

Nicholl's protest won the support of the organising committee and with funding of £2000 and the services of a director, scriptwriter and designer, *An Aboriginal Moomba* was staged at the Princess Theatre, Melbourne (fig 6). Unlike *Corroboree Season 1949* the program for *An Aboriginal Moomba* was divided into two parts, the Past and the Present. The first half dramatised Aboriginality in terms of a romantic and primitivist ideal of tribal life relaying the myth of Toolaba and concluding with 'tribesmen march[ing] forward into the sun'.¹⁰⁶ In the second half, billed as 'a Tableau of Progress', Koories aimed to show that they had maintained 'their inherent characteristics of courage, endurance and imagination [whilst they] adapted themselves to the new customs and culture of white people'.¹⁰⁷ The all-Aboriginal cast played before a backdrop which reproduced a landscape by Namatjira and was flanked either side by the intricate geometric designs found on the carved trees or dendroglyphs unique to the south-east.

101. Russell 2001: 64.

102. Beckett 1988: 4.

103. Attwood 2003: 196.

104. Attwood 2003: 196.

105. Attwood 2003: 196.

106. Attwood 2003: 196; Kleinert 1999.

107. Kleinert 1994: 221.



Fig 6: Cast of *An Aboriginal Moomba*, Princess Theatre Melbourne, 1951, Photo J. Hauer, Reproduced courtesy of the Arts Centre, Performing Arts Collection, Melbourne and the Onus and Nicholls families.

Dressed in a hybrid mix of traditional tribal costume and modern evening dress, the performers appear to slip easily between the apparently divided realms of 'primitive' and 'civilised' with traditional and contemporary cultural forms coexisting in a fluid assertion of identity.

An Aboriginal Moomba had an extraordinary impact on Melbourne's Koorie community, contributing to a new historical consciousness. Doug Nicholls would later reflect, 'We began to realise ... that we should be proud of our Aboriginal culture — that we should remember we were a great people'. He came to the realisation that 'We've been missing out because we've lost the interests of our own hearts ... Instead of teaching ourselves about ourselves, we've been studying whites'.¹⁰⁸ Nicholl's recollection of the impact created by *An Aboriginal Moomba* tallies with Fred Myers' analysis of the role played by performance in formations of cultural identity. Myers suggests that 'For both indigenous performers and their audience participants [cultural performances provide an important context] for the contemporary negotiation and circulation of indigenous peoples' identities': a form of 'culture-making', or more particularly, 'becoming Aboriginal'.¹⁰⁹ In this context the photograph of the performance resonates with additional levels of meaning for individuals and their kin as a palpable historical record negotiating between private and more public experiences of Aboriginality. In my experience such historical photographs act in a cyclic way as a catalyst for oral history, as an alternative space of enunciation between memory and history, a third

¹⁰⁸ Clark 1975: 157.

¹⁰⁹ Myers 1994: 679.

space that incorporates both the emotive power of memory and the factual evidence of an historical event.

Conclusion

In this paper I have examined a group of Koorie photographs taken in Melbourne and its immediate environs during the period of 'high assimilation' from the late 1930s to 1970. In my selection I deliberately chose not to reproduce negative images which represented Koories through racially inscribed paradigms. Instead I have sought to focus on positive images of Aboriginality previously overlooked. Within the opportunities and limitations imposed by assimilation policies, these photographs testify to a resilient and dynamic Koorie presence in the city, actively engaged in formations of cultural identity in dialogue with a colonial culture.

Contrasts can be drawn between the various photographs indicative of their particular context and the various registers in which they can be understood. A colonial ambivalence is indeed contained within what Taussig terms 'the very act of colonial mirroring' expressive of the tensions and contradictions that prevail in settler societies.¹¹⁰ In one sense the photographs apparently confirm the success of the colonial project: Koorie identities are seen to be historically created and mediated through the historical experience of assimilation. Yet Koories are also engaged in political struggles for recognition and equality. Most importantly, the photographs validate the self-perception of Koories themselves: Koories are 'reformed and given substance through photos'.¹¹¹ As Macdonald explains:

For ... Kooris photo[graphs] mark a divide in their history of colonisation. They moved from myth, whose conditions of existence were swept from their control ... [But t]hey were denied a part in Australia's historical narrative: as ahistoricised people who had 'lost' their traditions and 'failed' to become the citizens expected of them ... [Photographs] mediated the void left by this absence of myth and history.¹¹²

Because photographs have a unique capacity to verify the past which might otherwise remain unknown or distorted by colonial narratives, they are crucial to formations of cultural identity. Constructions of Aboriginal identity will inevitably be contingent and contested, 'subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power'.¹¹³ As an alternative space of enunciation, photographs mediate between memory and history: identifying points of difference between the past and the present and bringing the past into the present as witness to collective historical experiences.

Shaped through the exchange between black and white, photographs are seen to fulfil a performative role. In the performance of Aboriginality, Koories reclaim past traditions, and they appropriate from the frameworks of colonial power evident in the heraldic symbols of a young nation and the essentialising constructions of Aboriginality implied in colonial discourses, to carve out new, hybrid formations of identity in relation to regional affiliations and a nascent pan-Aboriginality. The ritual staging of

110. Taussig 1993: 25.

111. Macdonald 2003: 239.

112. Macdonald 2003: 239.

113. Hall 1990: 225.

Koorie culture mediated between these apparently opposed domains and in the process negotiated new roles and meanings for Koorie identities emblematic of their changed political, economic and social circumstances. Such a process of creative synthesis in the pervasive arena of mundane culture bears witness to Koories' reformulation of their social identity and material existence within the constraints of assimilation.

Acknowledgements

This paper draws on doctoral research undertaken with several Koorie communities in southeastern Australia. I wish to thank those individuals who assisted with my research and their support for my project: in particular Margaret Harrison, Albert Mullett, Doug Nicholls, Lin Onus, Herbie Patten and also Cora Gilsenan and Hilda and Dot Rule. This paper was originally presented at the 2005 'History through a Lens' conference at the National Museum of Australia. I wish to thank Frances Peters-Little for the opportunity to participate in this conference. I especially wish to thank Ingereth Macfarlane and two anonymous referees for their invaluable and perceptive comments. Every effort has been made to contact copyright holders for all the photographs used in this article. For any concerns regarding copyright please contact the author.

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A history of Indigenous futures: accounting for Indigenous art and media

Faye Ginsburg and Fred Myers

Introduction

This essay addresses the burgeoning of interventions by Indigenous artists and filmmakers into Australia's narrative of its history, over the last two decades. We examine not only the significance of this work in changing the cultural landscape of the continent, but also the paradox of the persistence, growth, and increasing circulation of such work in Indigenous cultural production, despite the alarming political turn against gains made by Indigenous Australians over the last decade, not only by right-wing politicians but intellectuals as well. While this essay works within the boundaries of Australia's situation, as American anthropologists who have worked for many years with Indigenous Australians, we are alarmed at the attacks on indigenous people's claims that have leaked into anthropology more generally. Most problematic is the polemic launched by the anthropologist Adam Kuper against indigenous people's movements, a position that gained him extensive publicity on the BBC radio, and an extended forum on 'Anthropology in Public' in the pages of *Current Anthropology*.¹ This is the broader context for our writing.

These debates are not new, although they are shaped by current situations. In the late 1970s, some anthropologists took up a position critical of pure culturalist approaches that failed to recognise an emerging and transforming Indigenous politics. For example, Terence Turner took issue with the model that identified Indigenous futures only with cultural preservation, ossifying such life worlds into unchanging enclaves. Instead, he proposed a focus on Indigenous self-production; one should not substitute the past products of people's actions (their culture) with the values people themselves sought to bring into being under constantly changing conditions. This position — which he elaborated in his work with the Kayapo in Brazil — resonates in many locations, including what we would call debates over Aboriginal futures that have been foundational to Australia.² These have been continually transforming as Indigenous people in Australia have become progressively more self-conscious and insistent on authoring the narratives that objectify their place in their communities, in the nation, and on the world stage.

1. Kuper 2003.

2. Turner 1979, 2004.

A spectre haunts Australia

We want to begin with an 1838 anecdote from the early settlement period of Western Australia, 40 years after first contact, which provides a compelling example of the power of the imaginary imposed upon Australia's Indigenous people at that time.

Walking from Perth to Fremantle once, on descending an elevation into an open valley near the sea-beach, I beheld two lawyers apparently wrestling with a grass tree. As I approached, I perceived that they were trying to uproot and throw it down. This not being an action of *trover* but one of assault, and seeing the harmless tree exposed to the vengeance of the law, I was induced to inquire what offence it had committed? They informed me that, mistaking it for a native, it had more than once frightened them, and that they were determined it should never do so again. These redoubted champions of the oppressed and the oppressor, so bold amid courts and clients, were terrified at the very idea of meeting an Aborigine.³

Now, in 2006, it seems that — like that tree 168 years ago — a spectre haunts Australia's lawmakers and its Indigenous people. The prime minister persists in his refusal to offer an apology for the nation's history of government programs destructive to Aboriginal life. This lack of recognition permeates many governmental decisions, such as the May 2004 abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). The 21st century has been marked by politicians and pundits debating a return to policies once thought thoroughly discredited, a sentiment captured in the title of the edited book, *Waking up from Dreamtime: the illusions of Aboriginal self-determination*.⁴ Not surprisingly, this disturbing reversal of political sentiment has emanated largely from right-wing critics of the progressive stance toward Aboriginal development. They have rejected hard-won principles of Aboriginal autonomy articulated by Indigenous activists since the 1960s, ideas that offered hope and a foundation for an Indigenous future beyond the non-choices of total assimilation or a frozen traditionalism.

But it is not only dedicated right-wingers who have been asking questions. In 2002, the historian Keith Windschuttle published the first volume of a promised three, entitled *The fabrication of Aboriginal history: Van Diemen's Land*.⁵ Even some anthropologists, discouraged by the devastating conditions in remote communities (alcohol abuse, petrol-sniffing, violence and death), have asked how aspects of Aboriginal culture unwittingly might contribute to such conditions.⁶ The Indigenous intellectual Noel Pearson, one of the principal negotiators of Native Title legislation in the early 1990s and a member of the Cape York Land Council, has insisted that Aboriginal people must take greater responsibility for the fate of their own communities, breaking down a pattern of 'welfare dependency'.⁷ Taking a different approach, Elizabeth Povinelli is nonetheless discouraging in her critique of the limits of Australia's multicultural frameworks that, she argues, rule out the recognition of non-traditional Aboriginal subjects.⁸

3. Lyon 1838, cited in Healy 1979.

4. Jones 2001.

5. Windschuttle 2002.

6. For example Maddock 2001; Sutton 2001.

7. Pearson 2001.

8. Povinelli 2002.

While the current situation is indeed alarming, we are concerned that Indigenous Australia's 'resources of hope'⁹ are rendered marginal. Where, in all this debate are the people with whom we have been working over the last two decades — the painters, the musicians, the media-makers — in short the cultural activists who are shaping, through their cultural labour, possibilities for Aboriginal futures outside the defining limits of law and policy? Through their cultural production, the Indigenous artists and intellectuals whose work we study and support are creating — in a range of media from dot paintings to feature films — an Indigenous presence for themselves and as a force with which others must reckon.

Clearly, questions about Aboriginal futures are not new; they have characterised the framing of policy about Australia's Indigenous inhabitants almost from the point of contact. *Are there Aboriginal futures?* What can we learn from examining the history of the ways in which they have been imagined over the last 200 years in policy and popular culture, and their transformation during the last half century in the hands of Indigenous cultural activists? Policies are, of course, not simply bureaucratic formations but are given vitality as a social force through powerful and persuasive narratives — most effectively in popular media through which they circulate promiscuously, seducing the hearts, minds, and support of the Australian public for certain projects in which Indigenous people have been positioned as inevitably disappearing. Over time and with increasing self-consciousness, Indigenous cultural activists have sought to crack the distorted mirror that has been held up to them. Beginning in the 1960s, from all parts of Indigenous Australia, urban and remote, people began talking back in the idioms available to them, from traditional bark paintings, to political performances intended for local audiences, as well as national radio, television, and cinema. They have been raiding the colonial archive, using their own creative work to resignify these documents and images that once naturalised ethnocidal projects, while also recuperating Aboriginal history for Indigenous people and all Australians. In what follows, we examine the post post-colonial work of Indigenous people whose activities go beyond critique, developing a counter discursive Aboriginal imaginary that is crucial to their contemporary self-production and the creation of a 'cultural future'.¹⁰ These efforts have been attained with great difficulty, struggle, imagination and the mobilising of a myriad of cultural resources.

This essay follows a doubled *telos* — tracing both the changing nature of Australia's policy towards Indigenous people's presence, and the work of Aboriginal subjects as they have demanded the right to represent themselves both politically and culturally. In other words, we are tracking a history of Indigenous futures in Australia, over a period in which Indigenous people have slowly but surely been re-imagining what they might be.

Dispossession, death, protection: disappearance

As is well-known, for much of Australia's history, from 1788 until the 1930s, the cultures of Aboriginal people were seen by British settlers as valueless, primitive, inferior, lacking civilisation, and having no rights to land. Indeed, the legal doctrine the settlers

9. Williams 1983.

10. Michaels 1987.

imposed, of the continent as *terra nullius* (or empty land), attempted to erase the Indigenous presence from, and claims to, the continent despite other evidence to the contrary. As they were being killed or displaced along the moving frontier and seemed unable to be 'developed', evolutionist preoccupations of the 19th century endorsed the policy of displacing or missionising them for their own 'protection', making Aboriginal people wards of the state, requiring protection and administration, including oversight of their work, their wages, their marriages, their movements.

By the 20th century, it was clear that despite efforts at segregation, the mixed-descent population was growing. An extreme position of the assimilation policy – inaugurated in the late 1930s – imagined this social fact as part of the supposedly natural disappearance of the Aboriginal, even to the point of genetic absorption. In her documentary *Stolen Generations* made in 2000, Indigenous filmmaker Darlene Johnson – whose work we discuss in detail below – draws from mission and government archives made during the 1930s to persuade the Australian public of the value and inevitability of assimilation, and resignifies them in her film, replacing the original narration with the voices of those who had been taken from their families. Their stories create a new narrative; the archival films are no longer indexical of Aboriginal 'uplift', but rather of the violence of Australian racial policy. Films such as *Stolen Generations* represent these images as part of an effort to undermine irreversibly the naturalising power they once had, while also demonstrating that white Australia has a black history, as the longstanding slogan proclaims.

Johnson's film makes clear how Australia's racial ideology gained legitimacy among well-intentioned white citizens through the technologies of photography and film. These were used to create visible evidence for Australia's citizens of the imagined transformations being wrought by this supposed 'rescue'. At one point in Johnson's film, she shows a black and white newsreel segment entitled 'A dream come true: Native girls' fairy palace', in which three Aboriginal girls from northern Australia are seen living in a wealthy Melbourne home, a modern assimilated location for their imagined future. In this case, one can see how easily the erasure of Indigenous family relations and cultural life takes place. In a chilling and seamless repetition of the *terra nullius* doctrine, but in the idiom of kinship, Aboriginal mothers in particular are erased ('these girls have no mother' the narrator tells us) while white families are valorised. Material advantage is posited as unquestioningly able to displace the unnamed and implicitly denigrated Indigenous resources of kinship and cultural knowledge. Such narratives, which circulated widely in movie theaters and eventually on television, are the forms through which the assimilation policy became naturalised for a broad Australian public, moving from bureaucratic documents onto celluloid and into the popular imagination. The segment's title takes on considerable historical irony as we hear other first-person accounts of the nightmarish experiences of what in fact happened to many children who were taken away from their Aboriginal families through the 1960s. These accounts provide counter-evidence of how projects of assimilation and removal were actually experienced by Aboriginal people.

The memories and consequences of being taken are movingly recalled in Johnson's interview sequence with Bobby Randall, the well-known Aboriginal activist/musician. Randall's song chronicling his own removal from his mother on Pitjantjatjara lands, 'My brown skinned baby', became an anthem for Aboriginal families across Aus-

tralia who had suffered similar fates. In the film, we hear his voice as we watch archival footage of Aboriginal children in a mission being washed, dressed in western clothes, and lined up in formation. The film footage in which Indigenous subjectivity was erased, now becomes redolent with Randall's narrative of the experience of removal — its sights, its sounds, its emotional landscape, and above all his inconsolable longing for his mother.

Through this film, Darlene Johnson, like other Indigenous cultural activists working in a variety of media forms, is intervening in the apparatus through which Aboriginal people were made iconic only of a traditional past or a dystopic present, and thus constructed as people with no future other than assimilation. In this case, by resignifying the very media the government and others used to deny recognition to the meaning of Aboriginal alterity, she recuperates history from an Indigenous point of view, creating what Ginsburg calls 'screen memories'.¹¹ Through the successful efforts of activists to gain a place for Indigenous media locally and in prestigious national and international venues, the circulatory reach of this work has succeeded in complicating, productively, the place of Aboriginal subjects in Australia's national narrative.

Their work addresses three aspects of Australian policy that particularly undermined acknowledgment of Indigenous experience, culture and history: (1) the lack of recognition of Aboriginal land rights; (2) the limitation of Aboriginal civil rights; and (3) the practice of removing 'part-Aboriginal' children for their imagined improvement. By the 1960s, Indigenous activists began to challenge these policies in these three key areas. Indigenous differences from other cultural minorities, in terms of sovereignty and their historical relation to land, were dramatically enacted in protests whose resonance was greatly enhanced by the burgeoning mass media in Australia. By mid-century this was able to amplify and circulate these political performances far beyond local enactments.

Freedom Ride — civil rights

In 1965, Freedom Ride protests in Australia's more populated south-east were led by Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins, attracting sympathetic white student activists concerned with the deplorable conditions among a more 'assimilated' and dispossessed sector of the Aboriginal population. Drawing on the Civil Rights model from the US, university students joined forces with Aboriginal people to carry out Freedom Rides in rural New South Wales, where racism was longstanding and entrenched. The Freedom Riders — Student Action for Aborigines — sought to bring attention to segregation of public facilities, inadequate housing, and other forms of discrimination.

In 1992, Charles Perkins' daughter Rachel Perkins made a documentary celebrating the accomplishments of Australia's Freedom Riders, in particular her father, as part of a series called 'Blood Brothers', for the Indigenous Unit of Australia's 'alternative' national television station SBS (Special Broadcast Service). Her major concern was to restore, in popular form, the history of Aboriginal activism from this key period when Indigenous subjects gained citizenship, voting rights, and visibility as legitimate social actors with claims on the Australian state. This film documents a paradigmatic shift in the imagination of Aboriginal futures by civil rights activists — both Aboriginal and

11. Ginsburg 2003.

Euro-Australian — who made claims on the promise of equal rights implicit in assimilationist ideology. The idealism and modest bravery of the white and black activists whose memories shape the film brings a clear message from the past about what might be accomplished in the present.

Performativity: manifestations of Indigenous presence and uncontrollability

Concurrent with the Freedom Rides, in remote Australia, the Gove Land Rights case and the Gurindji labor walk off contributed to the transformation of national consciousness and policies built on the model of assimilation. Both protests drew on traditional Aboriginal forms of performativity in which ritualised embodied display stands as a form of evidentiary truth.

In the first of these protests in 1963, the Gove Land Rights case, the Yolngu people at Yirrkala in Northern Australia sent bark petitions to Parliament to protest the excision of more than 300 square kilometers of their land for bauxite mining on the Gove Peninsula. Based on clan designs that represented traditional title to sacred places passed through kin groups, the bark petitions were a brilliant transformation of the longstanding cultural idiom of bark paintings into an emblematic form of cultural self-objectification as political performance presented to the Australian federal government, a calculated and ultimately successful act to gain attention on the national stage. (The petition is on permanent display at Parliament House.)

The Supreme Court judgment on their case eventually ruled against them in 1971, maintaining that there was no title to land; Australian law continued to regard the continent as *terra nullius*. Yet, the intuitively valid claims of Yolngu people to a distinctive, ritually formulated relationship to these places, epitomised in the bark petition, created great sympathy throughout Australia for recognition of Indigenous rights to land, and created an Aboriginal culture and identity acceptable for national recognition: the 'traditionally oriented' Aboriginal with religious and spiritual links to the land — and far from White settlement.

The second foundational case of Indigenous activism in remote Australia was the walk-off by Gurindji-speaking Aboriginal people who went on strike against Vestey's pastoral company in the Northern Territory, where they had worked for over two generations. In 1967 they stopped work, protesting the inhuman living and working conditions on cattle stations. They shifted their camp to another part of the lease, called Wattie Creek, and demanded acknowledgment that this was their land, asking for an excision so they might develop their own economic enterprises and over which they should exercise religious control. Their demands went beyond the civil rights model of the Freedom Rides, as Australian cultural historian Tim Rowse points out.

Their walk off, the firmest rejection of assimilationist thinking that Aborigines had yet made, was covered sympathetically in the southern press. Actions such as those of the Gurindji were beginning to expose a problem. Could the demands for equality and for indigenous land rights be reconciled? The less Aborigines had been exposed to Europeans, the more likely they were to see their law as having priority over the customs and legal system introduced by Europeans.¹²

¹² Rowse 1987: 140.

In 1967, Aborigines gained rights as Australian citizens, an act catalysed by growing awareness of the 'Aboriginal problem', and in sympathy with the Gurindji, Yolngu and Freedom Ride protests.

There is an irony in that these protests drew on long-standing Indigenous performative idioms for asserting claims to traditional ownership (or sovereignty). While these were effective in gaining the sympathy of white Australians, the reliance on 'traditional culture' as a basis for legitimate claims had (excuse the pun) a boomerang effect. Many Indigenous people who cannot satisfactorily demonstrate what was called 'traditional attachment to the land' are doubly dispossessed by their apparent 'lack of Aboriginal culture'.

By 1972, under pressure from activists, the official policy of the preceding era began to shift from an emphasis on the modernising fantasy of 'assimilation' and the eradication of Aboriginal culture, towards one of land rights, and 'self-determination', including support for distinctive cultural practices, the program endorsed by the new Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam of the Australian Labor Party. Many Indigenous people and their supporters expected that the recognition of rights of ownership over ancestral lands would restore a basis for Aboriginal people to face the future from a strong foundation based in their own cultural identifications.

Indigenous activists realised the dangers inherent in Euro-Australian legal systems enshrining traditional culture as the basis for Aboriginal identity and claims to land and other resources. This position threatened to divide Indigenous people among themselves, much as earlier racialised policies had created invidious distinctions between what were called 'full blood' and 'mixed blood' people.

Tent Embassy – black power, sovereignty

The movement from 'civil rights', towards self-determination built new forms of Aboriginal self-consciousness, kindled by the heady success of the Freedom Rides, the sobering rejection of the Yolngu claim, and an awareness of the impact of the American Black Power movement. This became dramatically evident in 1972 in a claim for Indigenous sovereignty represented by the planting of a materially modest but symbolically powerful Tent Embassy in front of Parliament House in Canberra. The protesters there were aided once again by the mass media's unwitting alliance in expanding the reach of this initially haphazard political performance on the part of urban Aboriginal activists – many active in theatre and law. This new generation was creating their own representations of what contemporary Indigeneity might look like for themselves and for the Australian public. They rejected the power of the state to define them and their future, pushing against the limits of the multicultural model.

In 1992, Indigenous filmmaker and musician Frances Peters-Little made a film about the Tent Embassy, following the young activists' lives 20 years later, in part to celebrate the anniversary of this event. Contemporary lives were framed by archival footage from the early days of Australian television, in order to present this key piece of Aboriginal history to the public. Like other Indigenous media-makers, Frances Peters-Little sought to use the power of national television to locate, re-circulate, and resignify images of urban Aboriginal people organising on their own behalf. *Tent Embassy* was intended to rupture Australian national narratives that excluded evidence of Aboriginal subjects as participants in their own political projects. If traditional ownership was

objectified through ceremonies, dancing, and dot paintings for remote living people, for urban dwellers like Frances, their legacy was inscribed on celluloid and videotape.

Documentary offered a technology of truth through which Peters-Little and others claimed the place of Indigenous activists in creating and contesting the Australian imaginary. The Tent Embassy was part of Peters-Little's history. She came of age in the 1970s in the cultural and political excitement of Sydney's black cultural and political life. Why, she wondered, in 1992 was there no public acknowledgment in the media or school curricula of the 20th anniversary of the groundbreaking efforts of the Tent Embassy. It had not been a fleeting incident; the protesters had stayed on Parliament grounds for seven months in 1972, irreversibly transforming not only government policy toward Land Rights and Aboriginal self-determination, but also the public shape of an Indigenous presence, amplified by burgeoning television and radio.

Yet, when Peters-Little was in school, this event — so significant in her own history — was virtually invisible. Such 'cognitive dissonance' motivated her (and others) to search out the evidence of Australia's recent black history and provide it with a second life through their own work. Frances Peters-Little was able to do so in her capacity as a producer at the Indigenous Programs Unit of the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). This unit was established as part of the demands of this later generation that Indigenous people have a greater voice and presence in national mass media, demands that peaked in 1988, during the Australian Bicentenary whose celebration Indigenous people vigorously protested. Demonstrators reminded Australia that they had not been 'discovered', renaming the day of Cook's arrival on antipodean soil 'Invasion Day'.

Self-determination

Throughout the 1970s, 'Aboriginal self-determination' was the watchword, suggesting that Indigenous people might imagine and determine their own futures; this involved the Aboriginalisation of institutions like the Arts Board of the Australian Council. However, by the 1980s, urban Indigenous people felt themselves denied legitimacy as Aboriginal, lacking what was taken from them by dispossession. As became clear in the process of adjudicating cases for the *Northern Territory Land Rights Act* (and later, in the 1990s the *Native Title Act*), the forms of recognition were still defined by government policy, making a cruel joke of legislation initially anticipated to acknowledge Indigenous autonomy. This is the heart, for example, of Povinelli's critique of Australian law and cultural policy¹³ and its denial of recognition to Indigenous people who were seen as lacking 'culture', 'language' and 'ritual', the attributes on which Australian policy based recognition of Aboriginality. Land Rights, as enacted, did not provide an organisational basis for a broad Aboriginality but rather reinscribed divisions between remote traditional people and urban dwellers, dividing people against each other based on external standards of authenticity.

The repair of this divide became a focus of subsequent political and cultural action, in particular through the strongest and most salient post-Land Rights formulation, articulated in what has come to be known as the Stolen Generations narrative.

13. Povinelli 2002.

Here, the resignifying of a crucial feature of Australia's assimilation policy — the removal of Indigenous children from their families — is the central theme. As discussed earlier, it was long known that Australian policies had removed mixed-race children from their Aboriginal mothers, placing them in institutions and sometimes out for adoption where they were often treated as household slaves. It was imagined that these individuals could be made into Australian citizens (albeit second class), but it was not recognised that this profound rupture of kinship and family life and its unacknowledged trauma might undermine children and their natal families alike for generations.

By the early 1990s, the fact and naming of the 'Stolen Generations' became iconic of the Aboriginal condition in Australia, motivating a 1995 inquiry that resulted in a report entitled *Bringing them home*¹⁴ which set forth a range of debates about responsibility, about the facts, and about the policies that had prevailed. It should be noted that the framework drew on an international vocabulary of reconciliation as an idiom for imagining how the body politic might acknowledge past wrongs and move forward productively into the future. In this articulation of Aboriginal identity occasioned by the inquiry, 'loss' became a central issue that gathered up the threads of a very broad Indigenous experience.

This is the circumstance that shaped the work of Darlene Johnson, the Indigenous filmmaker who made the film *Stolen Generations*. A light-skinned Aboriginal woman, she came of age in the mid 1990s, around the time when the *Bringing them home* report was being discussed and drafted. A student of the scholar and Aboriginal activist Marcia Langton and the filmmaker/photographer Tracy Moffatt, Johnson found that their work illuminated her own history, and she began to understand how she was part of a much larger process. Her first film, *Two Bob Mermaid*, made in 1996, is a short fictional work made for an initiative called 'Sand to Celluloid', meant to encourage emerging talent in Indigenous fiction filmmaking, and sponsored by the Indigenous Unit created in 1994 at the Australian Film Commission. *Two Bob Mermaid* drew on her mother's biography and the problem of Aboriginal people 'passing' as Whites, a 'choice' which required denying kinship with one's own darker-skinned relations. In the climactic scene of the film, the central character — a light skinned Aboriginal teenager who aspires to become a champion swimmer in a field where only whites were able to compete — faces that dilemma as it plays out during an inter-racial fracas at the segregated swimming pool in her town.

In *Stolen Generations*, Johnson takes the essential step of providing a framework for the public telling of stories of how Indigenous people came to be separated from their kin and culture, and the recurring consequences of that in their lives. As a narrative mnemonic device, Johnson brought people to sites associated with their natal families while making the film, encounters which we are privileged to witness. In circulating these stories through its screening, the documentary, like the *Bringing them home* report, is part of a broad process of cultural repair that begins with the acknowledgment by the Australian public of what happened.

¹⁴ National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families 1997.

It is clear that Indigenous people regard the removal policy and its effects as standing for the broader history of dispossession, non-recognition and racial oppression aimed directly at the heart of Aboriginal cultural transmission (of language, of custom, of religion) and at the heart of Indigenous sociality (kinship). The accounts collected from those who were adopted and removed are poignant testimonials of loss, of a sense of rejection and abandonment. Why, they wonder, did my mother give me up? Implicitly and explicitly, the pathologies described in contemporary communities are traced to their root in a narrative of violent disruption and dispossession.

Against the contemporary critics of Indigenous autonomy as a source of pathology, the Stolen Generations narrative provides a more complex genealogy, unpacking the evidence of the everyday impact of governmental policies that removed so many from their families, their cultures, their land, their languages, their histories. This loss, which the evidence so eloquently presents, is not seen as the result of Indigenous action but as having occurred in spite of their struggle. The differences among Indigenous people are understood as a consequence of policies. The question is how repair might take place.

Confessions of a head hunter was made in 2000, part of an ongoing initiative by the Indigenous Branch of the Australian Film Commission to train people in fiction film production mentioned earlier. In this antic but deadly serious film, director Sally Riley (the current head of the Indigenous Unit of the AFC) depicts the longed-for transformation of the colonial legacy through the story of a young man who had been adopted by a white family, and discovers his Aboriginal identity. Horrified by the wrongs committed against his ancestors by the colonisers of Australia, he sets off on a spree decapitating statues honoring colonial authorities, eventually transforming them into his own memorial depicting an Aboriginal mother and her children, recreating the family he never experienced.

Acrylic painting

Recent work on the acrylic painting movement traces another cultural intervention that has become significant in the formation of Aboriginal consciousness, a medium not only of Indigenous cultural expression and economy, but also of repairing the divide.¹⁵ Acrylic painting began in 1971 at Papunya as an assertion of Indigenous culture against the experience of assimilation at this settlement, a striking movement against the 'total institution' that critics had begun to see as the effect of settlement life.

This assertion of Indigenous presence through the redeployment of emblems of Indigenous identity and custodianship of their land continued the interventions that had begun with the 1960s (Gove) Yirrkala protests. Such acrylic painting had its roots in the desire for cultural respect and recognition; in showing their religious heritage, Indigenous people hoped they would convince the larger society of their ongoing cultural life and their claims to the land on which they lived. In this assertion of a continuing Indigenous presence, however, the circulation of acrylic paintings displayed not only cultural authority, but also sovereignty for the Aboriginal painters.

¹⁵ Myers 2002.

Acrylic painting gained practical support from sympathetic sectors of a changing Australian public service sector who could imagine Aboriginal culture as a basis for economic development and for a cultural pride they believed necessary for any development to occur. Yet, few of these advisers understood this as the painters did, as an exchange and display of valued sacred property, thereby constituting and objectifying relationships around which personhood could be defined and from which persons could project themselves.

Artistic recognition, in the form of increasing sales and commissions as well as exhibitions in venues of high cultural value in Australia and overseas, did allow this particular objectification of Indigenous culture to become a foundation for further action. The recognition of acrylic painting by the state, its incorporation into national collections was not simply a one-way appropriation. These exchanges conveyed value and political potential to the Indigenous project, and their objectifications have become loci of identification for a broader Aboriginal identity.

In September 1993, to take an important example, Michael Nelson Tjakamarra threatened to destroy the much publicised mosaic he had made in the symbolically charged forecourt of the Australian Parliament House. He was protesting against the change in the government's commitment to Aboriginal people during the 'Black Friday' impasse in the negotiations over legislation to implement native title. His design drew on the land-based mythological traditions of his country in central Australia, a Dreaming story that narrated the settlement of dispute between quarreling groups. He spoke before a group of 1000 demonstrators at Parliament House on 27 September 1993:

I am an artist, not a politician. I'm not used to standing up in front of everyone making speeches. I only speak for my paintings. And my paintings speak for me — and my culture. You don't seem to understand. You look at my work, all you see is the pretty painting, a pretty picture. That's why they asked me to come to Canberra and explain this forecourt mosaic. You the white people took this country from us. You must recognise Aboriginal people have our own culture, our Dreamtime, ceremonies, place where we held our corroborees for our Dreaming. It is what my paintings are about. My painting for the mosaic in the forecourt of Parliament House represent all the indigenous people in this land, the wider Australia. That's why I put all the different animals — represent to me all the peoples at this place. The circle in the middle is one of my Dreamings, a place back home. But it also stand for this place where all the Aboriginal people come and meet together, just like we do in our ceremony, to discuss and work together. White people must understand that this land is Aboriginal peoples' homeland, we are still here keeping the laws of the Dreaming. We want to keep our culture strongly for our children's children. We cannot do this without our land because it is our life, that Dreaming, story, the paintings, our culture, it is all tied to our land. This has all been changed. This is no longer a meeting place for Aboriginal people. The government of Australia are still not recognizing our people and our culture. It is abusing my painting and insulting my people. It make my people sad that government does not respect my paints or my people. I want to take my painting back to my people.¹⁶

16. Michael Nelson Tjakamarra quoted in Johnson 1997: 128.

Such action, in front of the nation's cameras and written media, shows how the paintings of traditional communities have come to take on a far larger cultural and political load as part of Indigenous cultural capital.

This was even clearer in 2000 at the 25 year retrospective exhibition of Papunya Tula painting — 'Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius' — at the Art Gallery of New South Wales as part of the millennial Olympic Arts Festival in Sydney. The Pintupi painters — once considered Australia's most primitive of Aboriginal groups, incapable of a cultural future — were now among those chosen to inaugurate the Olympic Games as part of Australia's presentation or marketing of itself to the world. The show was curated by Hetti Perkins, who might be called a 'post-Civil Rights' urban Indigenous cultural activist. The fact that she played so active a role in curating this show with a remote community is another kind of reversal of the historical and colonising separation of more remote, traditional people from their bicultural, urban-dwelling Indigenous compatriots. The Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at the Art Gallery of NSW, Hetti's position represents an important stage and a significant place for art and cultural institutions. The significance of the exhibition was to be understood not as a capitulation to the state but another intervention in its narratives. This was unquestionably a new stage in the production of Indigenous cultural life, one that could draw on past and present. The space of the museum, once considered an arena of containment by the dominant, became a space of other possibilities, enabling different consolidations of cultural power, in this case the alliance of remote Indigenous painters, urban Indigenous curators, and supportive fellow-travellers, as well as other Aboriginal artists and activists.

There are many histories — Indigenous, personal, intercultural — that can be brought into visibility and renegotiated through the circulation and recognition of this art. Here we draw attention to what is fundamental about Aboriginal painting as an objectification, about its capacity to bring into association social actors across a wide spectrum. Unexpectedly, these paintings have operated in a way resonant of the effects of traditional ritual objects that — as Myers argues in his ethnography of Pintupi people¹⁷ — provide a framework for people to recognise their shared identity. But such projections do not take place in a field free of tension and struggle.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Indigenous acrylic painting was increasingly legitimated in value as 'art' in a series of purchases and exhibitions by state-run art galleries (museums) in Australia, by banks and commercial institutions and some internationally celebrated exhibitions. Yet, this work was haunted by an undertone of suspicion, fueled by a series of art scandals, focused on forgeries of Aboriginal art and on cases in which works were sold in the name of famous Aboriginal painters that had actually been done by their kin. The scandals had the effect of undermining the certainty that painting represented an authentic form of Aboriginal presence, suggesting corruption of cultural value through commoditisation.¹⁸

These were questions about Aboriginality and the politics that surrounded Indigenous people during the approach of the 2000 Olympics. Such questions are (and were

17. Myers 1986.

18. Myers 2002.



Michael Nelson Tjakamarra, with Charlie Perkins, Matilda House, women from the communities of Kintore and Mt Liebig and others, prepares to remove the center stone portion of the mosaic of his design at the forecourt of Parliament House, Canberra, 28 September 1993. Photograph from *The Australian*, photographer unknown

then) understood to question the worth of Indigenous cultural production and its capacity to co-exist in modernity. Marcia Langton, the activist and intellectual who had inspired Darlene Johnson, regarded this as an insulting challenge to the integrity of the older men who had made this work: 'If you stand in front of some of these paintings, it is surely not possible to walk out of the gallery with the low level apprehension of Aboriginal art that is now circulating in Australian popular media. It is surely not possible'.¹⁹

The Papunya Tula show was a cultural and political triumph, but in its very success there is a paradox. This national exhibition of Western Desert acrylic painting ultimately comes up against the problem of race in Australia. While Indigenous Australians are increasingly celebrated in contexts such as the Papunya Tula retrospective, the wider conditions for their lives remain poor, and are in danger of further immiseration. How are we to understand the existence of such spaces? Under the Howard government, why would they be tolerating and supporting such an exhibition? The government of John Howard has abolished since 1996, special programs to support Aboriginal participation in higher education, and in 2004 dismantled ATSIC, the central source of funding for Indigenous communities and projects. In other words, while there has been broad support for Aboriginal causes and cultural work, policies and public debate have been increasingly organised around a denial of Indigenous claims to self-determination and efforts to expose and redress historical injustice. Clearly, in the context of the Olympics especially, the marketing of a distinctive Australia abroad through its Aboriginal cultural forms remains a valuable strategy, even within a regime hostile to Indigenous rights. At the risk of extending our argument too far, we want to point out that this kind of tipping point – the worldwide indigenising of the curation if not control of this kind of material – has an effect. While the recognition of Indigenous representations has served the interests of the state in some ways, they make the state's efforts at cultural and political containment anxious and unstable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we return to the question that motivated this essay: why is it that Indigenous media and painting make up such a significant part of contemporary Indigenous public cultural practice – presenting alternative narratives to dominant Australian historiography – yet are not given more recognition as a vital dimension of Aboriginal self-production? The practitioners themselves say that storytelling and performativity are modes with which Aboriginal people are comfortable. They give voice and visibility to Aboriginal subjects whose lives might otherwise go unnoticed, and they are forms with broad circulatory reach, from remote communities to the Sydney Opera House, to the Cannes Film Festival.

The practice of 'dot painting' in acrylics borrows the frame of art in order to project iconic tokens of Indigenous value and identity, a form in which the confrontation with White Australia has been indirect, but the assertion of Indigenous presence and sovereignty is still vital. Indigenous media-makers cross between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds in resignifying colonial narratives and dramatising the phenomenological life world of Aboriginal Australians. The re-narration of already existing

¹⁹ Langton 2000.

images, working with the heightened but slippery indexicality of media such as film and photography, ruptures the images' attachment to regimes that effaced Aboriginal experience, exposing instead their histories as distorted artifacts, that show the impact of Australia's racial policies in 'whitening' Indigenous subjects.

The films considered here are important not only for their reinscription of the archive; they are themselves performative of a transformation in Australian public culture in which Indigenous people are talking back and gaining acknowledgment of their realities, from a range of subject positions that render evident the complexity and vitality of contemporary Indigenous lives. Given the conservative drift of Australian political culture and recent academic challenges to Indigenous claims, their work takes on increasing significance as interventions into efforts to pathologise Aboriginal culture in the interests of neoliberal agendas.

And what of the work that we do, as anthropologists? Here, we want to quote briefly from a recent piece by Bruno Latour in *Critical Inquiry*, a polemic he wrote calling for a constructive critical practice entitled 'Why has critique run out of steam?':

The critic is not the one who debunks but the one who assembles, not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of naïve believers, but the one who offers arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between anti-fetishism and positivism like Goya's drunk iconoclast but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care.²⁰

Those of us who work with and study cultural activism have the opportunity to amplify as well as analyse their work, drawing attention to the possibilities of their creations as part of ongoing emancipatory projects that are 'in need of great care', as Latour says, in the face of the current spectre that haunts Australia.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Frances Peters-Little for inviting us to be part of this special issue of *Aboriginal History*. This article is a modest revision of an earlier essay, 'A history of Aboriginal futures' published as part of a festschrift in honour of Terence Turner in *Critique of Anthropology*, Winter 2006.

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‘The spirit, the heart and the power’: an interview with the ‘Stiff Gins’ on music, friendship and history

Therese Davis

The ‘Stiff Gins’ are Nardi Simpson and Kaleena Briggs — a vocal duo known for their stunning harmonies and what one critic describes as ‘a nice line in self deprecating humour’.¹ They have also received critical acclaim around the world for the originality of their song writing. One Scottish music critic wrote ‘they are women born to sing and who have no small amounts of true song writing smarts between them’.² And despite their youth, critics have recognised a certain maturity in their music: ‘whether offering a strummed guitar and harmonies, a boisterous *a capella* or a piano gospel lullaby these young women convey a striking maturity. ... They can sing beautifully and with joy’.³ The Stiff Gins have received numerous nominations for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous music awards, winning several awards for Best Live Act. In 2003 they were recipients of the Centenary Medal for ‘Services to the Community through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music’. These and other accolades (see Appendix) reflect widespread appreciation by audiences of their unique voices, songs and performance style.

Nardi and Kaleena are great friends, and this relationship is central to the Stiff Gins’ unique sound and their success as a vocal band. Nardi Simpson is from the Yuwaalaraay people with roots in Sydney’s inner west and country New South Wales. She began studying music in high school. She majored in voice for her Higher School Certificate, and after two years of a Bachelor of Arts degree at Sydney University, enrolled at the Eora Centre in Redfern where she met Kaleena and, not long after, started the Stiff Gins. Kaleena is from the Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta people — southern New South Wales and northern Victoria people — and was born in Melbourne. Like Nardi, she began studying music at high school and continued that study through to her Diploma in Contemporary Music at TAFE (College of Technical and Further Education) in 2000. Their friendship is openly celebrated on their first album *Origins* (2001). The second album *Kingia Australis* (2005) is regarded as a stunning follow-up, demon-

1. On Radio Forth FM 97.3, Scotland as cited on the ‘The Stiff Gins Website’, Pandora Website Archive.

2. *Evening News*, Edinburgh, as cited on ‘The Stiff Gins Website’ Pandora Archive Website.

3. *Sydney Morning Herald*, Metro as cited on ‘The Stiff Gins Website’, Pandora Archive Website.

strating their maturity as musicians and songwriters. It is very much a coming of age album.⁴ *Kingia Australis* reflects on childhood experiences of loss ('Absent Friends') and chronicles an early split in the band that had a profound impact on the direction Nardi and Kaleena chose to take from this point onward ('Hear Now'). On this second album their friendship is referenced in their expressions of shared and individual experiences of the highs and lows of adulthood: freedom ('Spinning'), self-image ('I Am'), loneliness and social alienation ('One of The Millions') and unrequited love ('Untitled'). These songs, as well as many new ones not yet recorded, also draw on the experience of travelling as performers overseas, 'the imprint', as Kaleena describes it, of the many cross-cultural exchanges they have undertaken in recent years.⁵

The distinct and what is often described as 'mesmerising' sound of the Stiff Gins music is also underscored by strong ties to family and Aboriginal communities. It is a hybrid musical style that draws from Nardi and Kaleena's formal training in styles ranging from folk to jazz. But their sound is also shaped by what Nardi refers to as 'the oral musical tradition' of her family. The result is a musical style characterised by its mix of song and spoken word, shades of lightness and melancholy. 'Soar', the first track on the latest album, for example, is a joyous, rich mix of Stiff Gins' harmonies with spoken word and laughter, the latter provided by family and friends. This use of multiple voices reflects the Stiff Gins' aim or 'vision', as they call it, to bring a community voice into their music. This commitment is also central to the way in which they use music to think historically about the present. In live performances they pay respect to Aboriginal family members, elders and communities, present and past. They invite us through song to consider the importance of social memory — how we remember elders, ancestors and past times, how we understand the relationship between the past and the present, indeed, how the past makes itself *felt* in the present.

In 2005, I met with Nardi and Kaleena in Marrickville, Sydney, to discuss their music as a means of exchanging history. They were extremely open, thoughtful and generous, and through the conversation I came to understand that history emerges in the Stiff Gins' music in a number of different ways. In some songs the past is addressed directly and in ways that calls historical knowledge into question. 'Legacy', for example, juxtaposes the historical experiences of the ANZACs at Gallipoli and the Aboriginal warrior Pemulwuy, offering a new, bi-cultural viewpoint on Australia's past. History also emerges in their music in indirect ways. Drawing on and often blending forms of personal and social memory, their music serves as a vehicle for exchanging very particular forms of historical experience — growing up black in late twentieth century Australia, being a young, black Australian woman living in inner city Sydney, performing as a black Australian female singer in both local and global music cultures. In this regard, the history of the Stiff Gins, as a name, as a band, as a 'whole way of living', reveals a great deal about the relationship between the past and the present in

4. See Message Stick, Black Arts review, <http://www.abc.net.au/message/blackarts/review/s1338623.htm>, accessed November 2006.

5. Nardi and Kaleena have performed together at cultural institutes in New Caledonia, Vietnam and Spain; been part of cultural exchanges to Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, Egypt and Cyprus; played festivals and shows throughout Canada, the US, Ireland and performed extensively throughout Australia.

contemporary Australia. For in this particular history we see how two young, proud and exceptionally talented black women draw on their friendship and their strong, ongoing ties to family and community as a basis for contesting official forms of history and generating new forms of historical imagination.

I. Stiff Gins: the history in the name

Diyin: Noun Aboriginal: Dharug woman, wife (1788)

Gin: Noun (often derogatory) an Aboriginal woman (1789)

Gin: (Standing) Proud & tall, carried by the strength of those who went before (1999)

— The Stiff Gins archived website

Therese Davis: Let's start with the history in the name — the Stiff Gins. Obviously this word has a history. Could you tell me a bit about that? Why did you pick this name that is so full of historical meaning? And what does it mean to you?

Nardi: When we were looking for a name when we first started, one of our white friends was talking about her sister-in-law who was preparing for her daughter's wedding, and she said 'Oh yeah she is really stressed out, she is not doing anything without three stiff gins in the morning.' And there were three of us at that time and we all looked at each other and ... for me, something just kind of clicked then. We knew the history of the name; gin as a derogatory term. White people had taken the word on and used it as an insult for Aboriginal women, but before that, many thousands of years before, it was an Aboriginal word for woman or wife.

So that's one of the things. [The name] had a layer to it before we even started, so we thought if we take this on we want to align ourselves with the strength and the power of the word before everybody knew it as something else. So if, say, we call ourselves Stiff Gins and we sing, and we practice hard, and we represent something that is opposite to what everyone thinks about that word, then people will first of all start thinking about it and then questioning it ... not just allowing it to remain as a slur. And also, through our singing, we will get to educate people about how the length of time that it was known as woman far outweighs that tiny little space in time, you know 200 and whatever years, when it's been used as an insult. So it was us wanting to claim our heritage, where we are from, wanting to interpret it in a different way and wanting to create a path forward, a new, forward thinking use of the word.

But other people's knowledge of the word gin was only one part of a whole. We also just liked it, because when we first started children's music workshops, [at the Eora Centre, Redfern] ... all the lads would jump on the equipment and it would just be the three of us [Nardi, Kaleena and Emma Donovan (who left the band in 2001)] left there and we thought 'Well we better do something you know, we can't just sit here and back them up all the time, it's boring.' For some people the name Stiff Gin can mean a drink, for some women it can represent a time where people were not respected, or women in particular weren't respected. But there's also the possibility for the meaning to be changed and reclaimed in the future, so, as I said, the name has many levels to it. Singing is one level, but there is also friendship and the similarities that we have and our differences. All the people and family that we know and the networks and all that kind

of stuff we have, are also part of it. Singing was just part of a whole. And so the name suited us.

Therese Davis: And what were people's responses to the name? Did you have any negative responses?

Kaleena Briggs: When we first started I didn't actually think we were going to have any negative responses ... I knew what the word meant but I didn't realise that it still meant something negative to a lot of people. We were at some gig in Adelaide and this lady came up and said 'Look I respect what you girls are trying to do but I don't like that name. I'm sorry I cannot stand that name.' And from that point on we realised we had to explain ourselves at gigs; why we took this name and what we were trying to do as young Aboriginal women, reclaiming a word. But most of the time the response has been positive; it was only like once or twice that it [a negative response] happened.

We had an article in the *Koori Mail* and [after it was published] this man wrote in and said along the lines of — we didn't know what we were talking about and we shouldn't use this name because it was hurtful. But Nardi wrote back on behalf of us. She wrote this really fantastic letter telling them we knew exactly what we were doing. Because when we realised that this was such an important word we went and researched the word and found out all the meanings we possibly could, so we could tell people 'We are not ignorant, we know exactly what we are doing.' And we also try to make people understand that, although we are young, we do know what we are talking about on this subject.⁶

Nardi Simpson: And that we knew that Stiff Gins was not just a band name, that if we were going to do all these things that had already had all these consequences, then we would have to conduct ourselves in a way that would be respectful to the people who have been hurt by that name. So we knew if we mucked around and got drunk and smashed up places, while called the Stiff Gins, then that is shameful to those people; that is giving more hurt to the people who have been insulted [by the name]. We knew from the very beginning that we were making a commitment to a way of being which was respectful to elders and which was also forging new ways and [new] understandings of the past ... So it's a band name but it's also a way of life for us. It sounds pretty full on, but we enjoy it with all the levels of stuff that come with it ... all the great experiences. The singing is kind of incidental because we are such good friends and the experiences and the people that we meet in the band are more important than the getting up and singing.

II. 'Soar': performing history

I have no pretences
All I am is what you see ...
A thousand times more humbled
Than I ever thought I'd be.

'Soar', 2005, Nardi Simpson and Kaleena Briggs

Therese Davis: Would you like to talk a bit about your performances? One of the things that I was really struck by when I saw you in Newcastle is how you use spoken

⁶ Chicka Dixon, Letters, *Koori Mail*, 31 October 2001: 9.

word as well as song to connect with the audience. I know a lot of bands do this but this was just a very different mode of talking, so friendly and respectful and open. It's hard to describe, you can see, as you say, that it comes from your strong friendship. So I was wondering if you could say a few words about how you work together in your performances? Is performance something that you think consciously about? How important are the stories and the talking?

Nardi Simpson: We've always talked more than we sing.

Kaleena Briggs: Just for example there was this gig we had to do, it was for an hour and we only had like four songs and we thought: What are we doing? And we ended up talking the whole gig and ... if you give us a microphone, or even without one, well we just love talking ... You want to make people feel as comfortable as you are plus you want to get across what you are trying to sing about as well. And you always think, 'If we just give a little bit of an explanation, they will enjoy it and understand it more, and maybe they will relate to it in some way.' But most of the time it's just getting up there and telling stories.

Nardi Simpson: But a lot of it comes from that point we make that the singing isn't everything; it's not really even one of the best things about us. (laughter)

Kaleena Briggs: Because it only lasts for like 45 minutes.

Nardi Simpson: It was like that in the beginning, the singing wasn't the only point. We got proud of what we could do well, we both did, and we tried harder to get better. But with any of our songs in our set list now, if we sang it and we didn't say anything about it, then I would feel like something's missing. There is all this other stuff that you need to know around it [the song], there is a before and an after, and a continuation of all those songs.

Kaleena Briggs: It's a trilogy.

Nardi Simpson: The song is just that one moment in time; there is a whole experience around it that for us is just as important.

Therese Davis: So would you say you give the songs a history? That you bring the history of the song into the performance?

Nardi Simpson: I reckon we never wrote song that doesn't mean anything. I have written maybe one that means nothing, that's just a musical expression of something. Everything else is part of a bigger whole.

Kaleena Briggs: And I think that is what we are trying to convey on stage, it's like we are singing the songs but there is this whole back-story to it as well. So you have to explain it or at least just say where it happened.

Nardi Simpson: It's very interesting the bits that you can't put into song. Like some things suit a song format and some things you just have to tell people.

Therese Davis: For me, it's that you provide a context rather than explaining the song away. There's still a lot of magic and mystery in the songs, the way they unfold, the incredible harmonisations ... But you give us a context in which to hear the song.

Nardi Simpson: That's good. We don't have an idea of what is going to happen, like we list our songs in order and then everything else is up to whatever happens at that time. And that is what we are conscious of, of never trying to script a whole lot of

stuff, because when we try to be a little bit formal or something we stuff up. I get really nervous.

Kaleena Briggs: But the crowd is important too, like you can feel the vibe from the crowd and the atmosphere, and there are some songs that we wouldn't sing at certain places, we just don't feel that people will listen to it and we just feel ... Like there is one song that is very important; 'Belong' and it's got this history about Nardi's family and her grandfather and I just don't want to sing that song at some places. And 'Gogo' which is about a young boy in Redfern who fell off his bike and there are just some places that you will not sing that because you think: 'Oh that crowd! They're not going to listen.'

Therese Davis: Talking of different crowds, do you ever feel expectations to perform in a certain way from a crowd? Do you think some people come with preconceived notions of you and your music?

Nardi Simpson: Overseas we'd done a few gigs which had been advertised as 'Aboriginal Vocal Trio' ... I don't know what they thought. This was in Edinburgh ... and there was this group of about four old Scots and when we started singing our manager heard them say 'They're not Aboriginal, where is their paint? Where are their costumes?' And they walked out. And we were conscious when we went overseas at that time that people have this idea of Aboriginal performance, and if you don't do that then it confronts people, so they leave rather than think about it. And so at that time we were sort of struggling personally about how we were going to continue. Identity was not an issue to us, but it was something that was weighing on us a bit because we say we represent something, we come over into a different country and yet there is nothing recognisably Aboriginal about us to those audiences. Nothing. We don't even look Aboriginal to them. And that makes us think 'Well what have we got to do to represent ourselves over here the way that we feel about ourselves back home?' So all that kind of stuff was happening. And we just came home from that tour ... and I don't know, we never had a discussion about it, we just started to write songs that meant something to us. People have got to deal with it [the issue of Aboriginal identity] that way.

III. 'Legacy': re-interpreting history

The warrior, his red carved on his chest
 The soldier with them medals pinned,
 swinging from his vest.
 The crow and the flame –
 Promise to remember them.
 They spilled blood for their secrets.
 They drew blood for a future.
 Young and free.
 They fought bravely on foreign shores.
 They fought bravely at our back door.

Frontline, Frontier.
 And oh what a price was paid.
 Legacy – At the battlefields and at the graves.

'Legacy', 2005, Nardi Simpson and Kaleena Briggs

Therese Davis: So there's the history in the name, and the history around the songs. But you also have some songs that deal directly with historical events and things. There are even a few songs that pinpoint places where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history intersect. I was wondering if you'd like to say something about songs such as 'Legacy' and 'In Paradise'?

Nardi Simpson: 'Legacy' ... I was doing a correspondence course ... I was trying to finish off my degree and I went to open learning and they had an Australian Studies course ... So I was going through all this Australian studies stuff and they were looking at the Anzac legend, and how a lot of that was really created through the press, and how the legend grew not because Australians were any braver or anything than any other mob that fought over there but because it was the beginning of Australia's identity as a nation ... And you can see it still now: I don't know anyone directly who fought in any of the wars, anyone in my family, so Anzac Day for me is something I watch on TV and I can see, I can understand, where all the feelings are coming from, but I don't feel anything. I get sad when I see the old fellas marching and I think: 'They're the last of that generation.' And that's sad. But I don't feel the close swelling of pride of fighting, even though I'm very proud of being Australian.

Anyway, a while ago, like maybe two years before [I did the course], I read a book by Eric Wilmot; *Pelmuwuy*.⁷ It was about Pelmuwuy the warrior out there in Parramatta ... about the conflict in the first contact and the Aboriginal story that wasn't told and all this other stuff. So [when I was doing the course] I was learning about when Australians were fighting for their homeland — which was seen as England you know, Great Britain — and I was thinking, 'But wait; there is this imbalance here in the information.' A lot of Aboriginal history is oral, so people don't give any credence to it, but I could see they [the Anzacs and Pelmuwuy] were both fighting for country ... for different things but also the same things. And I felt like I was in the middle, well not the middle, I could understand the Anzac thing and [at the same time] I wanted recognition for those old times with the old people. I wrote a song was a comment on that.

Therese Davis: It's a powerful song. We really get a sense of what you're saying about being caught in between two views.

Nardi Simpson: Yeah, the first time I went on that river cat [ferry] out to Parramatta, out to his [Pelmuwuy's] homeland there, ... I left from Circular Quay and half an hour down the road I was in mangrove swamps, you know. I thought it was like a physical time machine and those two things that seemed so far away [Pelmuwuy's frontier resistance and the frontline fighting at Gallipoli] were next to each other on that ride. So that ride triggered my thinking about those two different conflicts and how both people were fighting for country. But what is country? And I really get a vision of all those medals swinging when the soldiers march and how the old fellas used to have scars you know, it's the same kind of thing, it represents a lot of similar things in a way. So I walked in that world where I've got that history, that Aboriginal history which forms part of me, and also Australia. White history is part of my history too, and I don't see any conflict there. I like to comment on both sides, so that is what the song is about.

⁷ Wilmot 1987.

We don't sing that song much. I feel sometimes it's a bit too deep and because it's slow too, I think people are waiting for it to finish anyway. When I wrote it, I liked it.

Kaleena Briggs: I love it.

Therese Davis: And 'In Paradise'?

Nardi Simpson: Yeah Norfolk Island was just a funny old place, eh. When we were there it was very weird, it's got an aura about it, and the people were really lovely.

Therese Davis: Yeah it was interesting for me that you chose to sing a song about the history of Norfolk Island, a land 'claimed for a king'. I was interested that you actually took up that history for them. It puzzled me. And then I was thinking of the line where you say 'Ghosts of yesterday make people what they are today' and what that might mean to you in relation to the particular history of this island or Australia in general?

Nardi Simpson: Well that's one of the things that's true for you; black or white, that is true for people. And again I suppose it's the idea of time and how people move through it is really interesting for us as a band, eh.

Kaleena Briggs: True.

Nardi Simpson: If you are good at your craft you can comment on either thing — black or white history — equally as well. The things that aren't as important to your core, you can still sing about them, and make a good song.

Kaleena Briggs: But that's what it is anyway, it's what you see and what you find interesting, and would like to talk about.

Therese Davis: Yeah, that's what I think is interesting. You comment on experiences from your unique perspective. Going overseas and everything, bringing back stories of Africa, say, responding from that perspective. This was what I was thinking about in terms of your music as a form of exchanging histories: you taking your histories, our histories, to places like Edinburgh and Africa, but also you bring histories of those places back.

Kaleena Briggs: But that's what we want to happen. In Africa, we thought 'Oh this will all be great inspiration to write songs and everything', and then we actually got to write our songs about Africa (but we haven't actually played them yet) and I was thinking, 'Man I don't know if I want to play this song because the only people who will get it are the people who actually went over with me.' And I thought: 'I've got to change this song in some way.' But maybe every time I get up there I'll just sing it for them, the people I was there with.

Nardi Simpson: No, but I disagree with that. I reckon people listening will go there, because they can see that place when you sing about it.

Kaleena Briggs: Well that's hopefully what it'll convey. I wanted so much to write about Africa because it made such an imprint on my life and also because of the people who I went over there with. It's a tribute song.

IV. 'Hear now': the history of the band

Time has passed, and it's all new.
Walk the path of destiny.
A different beginning
and new ways to move.
Fly on, creating our history.

'Hear Now', 2005, Nardi Simpson and Kaleena Briggs

Therese Davis: What about your own history? I know you've been through a split with an original member of the band, changes in line up.

Nardi Simpson: Kaleena's got a song on *Kingia*, 'Hear Now'. It's the last track. It's the history of our band ... like we keep referring back to it. It was a big deal then but it's not so important to us now. It was written when that third member [Emma Donovan] left, so that song is the history of our band up until that point. You know we can sing about where we are, and what we have read, and who we have met, but if you don't give a bit of your own thing then I don't reckon you improve or mature or whatever. But that's a really good song, I really love that song. It's a really good history lesson about us.

Kaleena Briggs: Yeah, it goes back to 2001 ... we were very excited, and this is when the other girl was still in the group and we were about to go on our first world tour. And we were going to like so many places, from Vietnam to Amsterdam, the UK and over to Canada and to New York, so it was all over the world, it was fantastic; it was going to be amazing. And the day we were supposed to leave, she [Emma Donovan] didn't come to the airport and we were going away for nearly three months. And at that point we were all best friends and Nardi and I kind of had an inkling that she didn't want to go — she'd pulled out of the band a few times before and we kind of had to talk her back in. We were freaking out. We had to take Nardi's younger sister, [Lucy Simpson], who knew all the songs to Vietnam; we had the best time over there. And then we had to get another girl, [Mihi Rangi (Vanessa Fisher)], to come over and do the rest of the tour. She had to learn the songs on the plane!

So all these things were happening — we were going overseas, plus we just had our new album out (not this one, our last one), and she was all over it. It was a really hard trip because we were with people we didn't really know. I mean we were fine because we knew each other so well, but for everybody else it was kind of hard. But then Nardi wrote a song over there ['Untitled'], and that song was kind of the turning point when we realised we could sing more personal songs. ['Untitled'] captures all that experience of where the change happened — it was in Edinburgh. All that stuff with Emma and everything just collided there. We were not happy with the way things were happening around us. That whole experience with Emma changed the focus of our band and I knew then that I could write that song ['Hear Now']. It was kind of telling her off but also explaining to everybody what we were doing.

Therese Davis: So how would you describe the change? What was the focus when there were three of you? Was it more political?

Kaleena Briggs: No. The thing is the band subtly had been all about Emma. We were in the background. I don't think we even realised that until she was going — holy

crap! ... And we didn't realise we wanted to take the band this seriously. It was just fun up until that point. And then we realised: 'Man, we really want to do this, we want to keep this thing going.'

Nardi Simpson: Up until then, we never really wrote any songs of any substance, because we were so young and we didn't really know how to, like we didn't have the skills to write the songs that we are writing now. Then all the songs were all about how isn't this great, we are having a great time, we are best friends. It was all about fun in the beginning. And that proved to be a good training ground for what we do now. But there was never any depth.

Kaleena Briggs: It was all sunshine.

Nardi Simpson: It was through that whole experience [of Emma leaving] — and Kaleena's song ['Hear Now'] is a reflection of us changing. We thought, 'We've got to step up here and own this kind of thing.' Yeah, so that's how it changed.

Kaleena Briggs: There was that point where we seriously thought, 'Well we can't do that.' But that was fleeting, and then we thought, 'No we've got to keep going.' Because we knew it was a good thing and there aren't a lot of young Aboriginal women doing this stuff, not that we knew of. We thought it was just important to continue, and especially for us as well, because I don't think at that point we had any confidence in ourselves. And then it became a breeze — 'Man we can write our own songs. This is great.'

Nardi Simpson: Yeah, I have been very privileged to have seen a journey in Kaleena herself, but also in her writing, fully big time.

Kaleena Briggs: But it's the same with her as well, because Nardi at the beginning of this band was not confident at all in her ability to sing, she was hiding, especially behind the guitar. But the band has progressed and her song writing ... well she just has kind of Whoosh!, you know, she's come out so much really, she is very honest.

Nardi Simpson: We see a lot of Indigenous women, young girls so shy that they can't look at you. They will sing their guts out in their room to Maria Carey and sound better than her, but if there is room for their friends there they won't do it. And I reckon there's a big step between trusting yourself that you are good — as good as you think you are — and then telling other people about it. And I think that your song 'Paranoid' (Nardi says to Kaleena) mirrors a lot of people's insecurities about themselves and you just singing that song that helps them ... But, yeah, so much shame, so shamed. And you [Kaleena] had a bit of that, we all did. I was hiding behind the curtains. I never spoke onstage. I just sung with the girls, they were the ones who did the talking. We used to say I was the mysterious one 'cos I just wouldn't do anything. I was just really shy; sing a song and that's it. And then I had no choice. I had to talk.

Therese Davis: Yeah, I can see how you've matured in lots of ways. And lots of the music reviews comment on the maturity in the new album and the fact that you took complete musical control from the writing through to the recording. Do you want to talk about the new album? The title is interesting. It takes us back to the history in the band's name.

Kaleena Briggs: As we said before, like the name Stiff Gins is kind of a play on words, like gin and that. With this one it was the same kind of deal; *Kingia australis* is

the botanical name for the black gin plant; it's related to the Black Boy. The *Kingia australis* is a ...

Nardi Simpson: Grass tree.

Kaleena Briggs: Yeah, grass tree, it's indigenous to Western Australia and we did our research on this plant because we wanted to make sure we just didn't have a name for an album, that we knew what we talking about. So for about three or four months we went out trying to find this plant but we couldn't find it. It's only in Western Australia, and it takes a very long time to grow. Like we saw pictures of these big long ones that are like hundreds and hundreds of years old. And we liked the story behind the name because this plant flowers after a fire, so we felt like we were flowering after what had happened to us. Like in adversity we were blooming. So we felt a connection to this plant, but if you ever actually look at this plant it's quite ugly. (laughs)

Nardi Simpson: I don't think it is.

Kaleena Briggs: I don't think it's got nice flowers at all.

Nardi Simpson: And the blackfellas used to use it as a fire stick and all the birds are attracted to it after.

Kaleena Briggs: And the resin from it, when it drops, it's made into this stuff called yakka, and that's where you get [the term] hard yakka from. Yeah, so it's got this whole long history behind it.

Nardi Simpson: There's something else too. It's a plant and organic and all that stuff, and we recorded this album at home. We had one fella to help us, Warwick [Saville] from SBS [Special Broadcast Service], who we knew; he was a friend of ours. And we got our mothers and sisters to sing on it, and we got our friends to play, so we just sort of borrowed from our environment as well, and it's deliberately not a polished album. That's how we wanted it.

Kaleena Briggs: It was recorded at Nardi's where a lot of the Stiff Gins started, our writing songs. We always used to hang out at Nardi's mum's place.

Therese Davis: So the name is really apt.

Nardi Simpson: Yeah I hope so.

Kaleena Briggs: Yeah, and we are really proud of that one, I think because it was our first album. Just us two.

V. 'Facing the world'

Given time, you will find your song –
 Hidden cadences made by you becoming strong.
 I'm standing on the edge
 I'm looking up, straight ahead
 Counting pots of gold and possibilities that lie ahead –
 I'm facing the world ...

'Facing the World', 2005, Nardi Simpson and Kaleena Briggs

Therese Davis: And plans for the future?

Nardi Simpson: We've got a few plans. We just finished with our manager so this is a time of movement, like you always reassess yourself, and you worry about your

weaknesses. Anyway it's a time where we are going to have to do a lot of thinking and creating of our future on our own for a while. I think we are going to be by ourselves without a manager for a little while.

Kaleena Briggs: Which is something that we have realised: that doing this you really need to do a lot of the stuff yourself because a lot of people just won't get your vision, which is kind of what happened.

Nardi Simpson: That's the thing, I think people who work in the music industry don't have time to see or to take in all this stuff here that we are talking about. People can get us gigs but that vision of the whole ... we are really missing having someone who can share that. Anyway, we are going to do a tour in July 2006.

Kaleena Briggs: An intimate tour of places, we are going to Newcastle definitely, rural, remote or not remote ... maybe but lots of places around Australia, and then we are going to tour overseas.

Nardi Simpson: We are organising that tour by ourselves, so that's going to be a good thing for us. And we are going to do work at the Commonwealth Games in March 2006.

Kaleena Briggs: We are going overseas in January and February; we are going to Cairo and Cyprus.

Therese Davis: Wow, you girls really are world travellers!

Nardi Simpson: But that is the thing that we say, like we've done nothing really to deserve that. Like someone's come along and said 'Oh, Stiff Gins they would be good for Australia Day in Cyprus.' And they ring us. And now we are going to go, you know.

Kaleena Briggs: It's going to be full on. So we are doing Australia Day for some peacekeeping troops in Cairo, and it was like 'What?'

Therese Davis: Wow, that's history making, isn't it?

Kaleena Briggs: Yeah, like Nardi was saying before: the music sometimes is second place to all the other experiences that happen. Like being in this band we are able to go to so many places and just ... well that's all I wanted to do. Just travel and meet people and see interesting places and have great food. And with this band we just have been able to do it.

Nardi Simpson: And we are at the point where bands our ages are starting to drop off, you have a family or you get a job that earns you money to set yourself up. So we know that the next part is important for us. I think we've set ourselves up all right. We want to keep going till we're dead, eh.

Kaleena Briggs: My kids will be in the band then. (laughter)

Nardi Simpson: And of course, I'd love us to win an Aria [Australian Recording Industry Association award].

Kaleena Briggs: That would be our top thing for the moment.

Nardi Simpson: Because that would mean people would know us and because it would show that quality can win that stuff — somebody who sings about something

which has some kind of depth to it and that is musically interesting as well. I'm sick of bands that sort of sound good but that's it.

Kaleena Briggs: And not only that. Just for us I would like a little bit of recognition ... You don't want to sound like you're full of yourself or anything but we have been doing this for six years and we get to go to all these amazing places and everything and you want people to realise how cool that is and how not a lot of people are doing that kind of thing. And we did this new album all by ourselves and there is a lot of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists doing the same thing but especially, I think, as we are young Aboriginal women as well, well that's cool.

Things have changed —
A light surrounds the future.
We survived, the test is done
The tasks were set
And we completed each one.
Fly on, creating our history —
With the Spirit, the Heart and the Power.

'Facing the World', 2005, Nardi Simpson and Kaleena Briggs

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Appendix - Awards and nominations

2005 Nominees, Album of the Year; Band of the Year; Single of the Year,
The Deadlys, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music Awards

2003 Recipients of the Centenary Medal for 'Services to the Community through
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music'

2002 Winners, Songlines Award,
Australian Live Music Awards Best Indigenous Live Act

2001 Winners, Best Single,
The Deadlys, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music Awards

2001 Nominees, Best Live Act-NSW,
Australian Live Music Awards

2000 Winners, Most Promising New Talent,
The Deadlys, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music Awards

2000 Nominees Best Female Artist,
Australian World Music Awards

Blackfellas rapping, breaking and writing: a short history of Aboriginal hip hop

Tony Mitchell

Munki Mark: 'The architect of Aboriginal hip hop'

The history of hip hop in Australia is largely a question of often competing oral histories of local developments in various places. It began with breakdancing, largely inspired by Malcolm McLaren's 1983 video clip *Buffalo gals*, which was followed by out-breaks of graffiti writing, inspired by Charlie Ahearn's 1982 film *Style wars*. Rapping, rhyming and DJ-ing followed on, partly encouraged by Stan Latham's 1984 film *Beat street*, and recordings by Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Africa Bambaata and other pioneers of what at the time was a predominantly African-American musical idiom.

Ian Maxwell's book *Phat beats, dope rhymes* is an ethnographic study of hip hop in Sydney from 1992 to 1994, which focuses mostly on Def Wish Cast, Sound Unlimited and other western Sydney crews, filtering a lot of his historicisation through authority figures in the scene such as Blaze and Miguel D'Souza. One of the myths of origin for Sydney hip hop that Maxwell notes is the scene which took place in Burwood Park in 1983, with breakdancing crews such as the Westside Posse, later Sound Unlimited, representing a multicultural gathering of the faithful, many of them coming by train from east Sydney. As Sound Unlimited put it in their track 'Tales from the Westside': 'Let's get back / I'll start at Burwood park / hip hop breakin' after dark / many crews would join the fray / travel from east to west upon the train / some to break some to inflict pain.'¹ Maxwell provides accounts for only two examples of Aboriginal hip hop, both female crews, in the early 1990s who never recorded, and whose names he mis-spells. He describes performances by the 'Aranta' (Arerrnte) Desert Posse, who combined traditional dance with a rather artificial enactment of rap at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, and quotes lyrics about Aboriginal genocide from the short-lived duo 'Black Justice' (Blakjustis), a Redfern-based crew who recounted to him Public Enemy's rather tokenistic attempts to communicate with Redfern youth. Maxwell then quotes local luminary Blaze to the effect that Blakjustis were 'not really *Hip Hop*'² and after noting the widespread appeal of African-American hip hop to Aboriginal youth, although it was yet to sell as many records as country and western, moves on to broader questions of class and ethnicity. Maxwell's account is not at all reprehensible, but it demonstrates

1. Sound Unlimited 1992. See also Maxwell 2003.

2. Maxwell 2003: 68.

the invisibility of Aboriginal involvement in the early days of Sydney hip hop, an invisibility which has recently begun to be redressed.

Morganics, Australia's most ubiquitous MC, beat boxer and breaker, an Anglo-Australian former actor and theatre director who has been a mentor and producer to many fledgling Aboriginal hip hop artists all around the country since the late 1990s, was another early participant in Sydney hip hop. He began breakdancing in Circular Quay in 1984, later linking up with Lebanese-Australian MC Sleek the Elite on Oxford Street. But Bankstown-based Aboriginal MC Munki Mark's recollections of Aboriginal hip hop, which begin in Redfern in 1982 with breakdancing, a graffiti crew called Black Connection, and later some MC-ing and rhyming, suggests the Indigenous hip hop scene may have got there first. Usually invisible and inaudible in the many debates and oral histories which have taken place over the years in the mainstream media, the music street press and numerous website forums about Australian hip hop, MC-ing by Aboriginal practitioners is starting to emerge into the light. The 2005 Deadly Award Best New Group winners, Newcastle-based Local Knowledge, arguably achieved the highest profile before their unfortunate breakup in mid-2006. Actor-MC BrothaBlack (Shannon Williams), Murri MC and producer Lez Beckett, winner of a 2005 Deadly Award for most promising new talent, with his new crew Cypher Duem, and Ebony Williams, Sydney 'femcee' and Indigenous Music Officer for the Music Managers' Forum are also well-established figures. In 1993 Munki Mark founded multicultural hip hop collective South West Syndicate, an extended family of a crew which included a quadriplegic Lebanese-Australian MC as well as Pacific Islander, Croatian, German, Lebanese and Anglo members at various times. SWS played a major part in 'Hip Hopera', a western Sydney community hip hop project directed by Morganics and Urban Theatre Projects in 1995. 'Hip Hopera' was a watershed for Sydney hip hop, and SWS subsequently won a Deadly Award in 2003, shortly before they broke up. In 1997 they gave a high-powered live performance at Granville Town Hall as part of the Hip hop for Palestine event, which was filmed by SBS but never screened. They were also involved in *A place of peace*, a three week hip hop project filmed by Penny Nutt for the ABC's Indigenous Unit in 2001, which was held at the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre in Redfern, funded by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training. This included as facilitators Morganics, Lez Beckett, Fijian-Australian MC Trey and Elf Transporter, another hip hop pedagogue who rapped with Morganics in the important Sydney group MetaBass'N'Breath, and is now based in Melbourne with the workshop facilitators Lab Rats and the militant ecologist hip hop crew Combat Wombat.³

After SWS broke up, Mark, a fair-skinned Koori who also has German and Irish heritage, and who has been described by BrothaBlack as 'the architect of Aboriginal hip hop', began working with the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, and he has participated in the Indij Readers series. This has produced educational books by New South Wales Aboriginal role models and elders such as Anthony Mundine, Michael O'Loughin, Adam Goodes and Cath Farrawell. Mark published the primary school text *Raps 4 little fullas* which comes with a CD, based on his workshops in Bogabilla. These led to the formation of a pre-teen hip hop group called the Bogabilla Thrillers who have 15 members and have performed numerous gigs in southern

3. Nutt 2001. (Also released as a CD, *Hip Hop, A Place of Peace*, Self-produced, 2001).

Queensland and northern New South Wales. *Raps 4 big fullas* is the secondary school version, a colourful collection of rap lyrics and graffiti design which deal with a trip to the city, life in northern New South Wales, Aboriginal role models in sport, such as Cathy Freeman, a game of football, breakdancing and place names. It also contains a long piece entitled 'Dreamtime', lyrics superimposed over colour photographs of rocks and waterways, about the importance of Aboriginal accounts of Australian history:

Aboriginal life always filled with songs of history
 Laws and customs, no mystery
 White man found a happy healthy people and
 It took 50 years to civilise them off the land
 First Fleet officers cashed up with publishing fees
 Mixed fact and fiction in their biographies
 Observed, captured, examined, kept as slaves
 Then killed if we misbehaved⁴

Another piece entitled 'Dreamtime' concludes with a plea to maintain traditional Aboriginal culture:

Once the corroboree is gone, we're finished
 So the importance should never be diminished
 Nor should the songs or stories from the old days
 Shouldn't have to surrender our culture or old ways
 Total disrespect for our culture and meantime
 I wish I could go back to the Dreamtime.⁵

Raps 4 big fullas includes a story in the Gamilaraay language, along with an English translation, about a grandmother and granddaughter catching a fish from the creek, cooking it and eating it with crayfish, turtle, shrimp and yams with the rest of the family who have returned home from relatives in Gunnedah.⁶ MunkiMark has also rapped in his grandmother's language, Jardwadjali, the language of the Grampians in Western Victoria, in Arrernte, spoken in Alice Springs (SWS's track 'What A Place' has lyrics in Arrernte), and picked up bits of Wiradjuri, Gamilaraay and Uliraay in his travels. As he has said:

We try to go toward a corroboree sort of thing. Aboriginal language was never a written language; it's always been an oral and visual language, stories being passed down through rituals, corroborees, song and dance. Hip hop fits in quite well with that, and Aboriginal hip hop is out there and all the communities know about it. The elders know that Aboriginal hip hop exists and are keen to get us people into their communities to show the kids that they can get their own people doing it.⁷

Despite having been extensively indigenised in almost every culture around the world, rap and hip hop are still perceived in the public sphere and through mass media as primarily African-American musical forms. The mainstream manifestations of vio-

4. Monkey Mark 2004: 11.

5. Monkey Mark 2004: 14.

6. Monkey Mark 2004: 20–21.

7. Interview with MunkiMark, conducted by Tony Mitchell, Alastair Pennycook and Nick Keys, 4 November 2005, Klub Koori, Sydney University.

lent posturing, machismo, misogyny, ostentatious wealth (bling bling), pimping and brutality, which are still embedded in the dominant sounds and images disseminated around the world in music videos and on commercial radio stations, provide fuel for politicians and pundits alike to blame it for youth moral panics from the Lebanese-Australian youths rioting in Cronulla in December 2005 to the earlier demonstrations by Arab and North African youth in France.⁸ Aspirational prime minister Peter Costello even blamed it for what he referred to in a speech to the Hillsong Church in Sydney in 2004 as the 'moral decline' of Australian youth. But Aboriginal hip hop practitioners, and the many other forms of what might be called 'native' Australian hip hop, which have been simmering underground over the past two decades, demonstrate that the four elements of hip hop – graffiti, breaking, DJ-ing and MC-ing – are often highly positive, even educational forces. They have certainly provided important voices and vehicles of self-expression for disenfranchised and disadvantaged young people from a wide range of different ethnic backgrounds in Australia.

In MunkiMark's case, as for some Maori and Samoan MCs in Aotearoa/New Zealand, hip hop has also provided a means of retrieving and giving public voice to indigenous languages, history and cultural forms. MonkiMark has mentored Palestinian-Australian MC NOMISE, who played an MC and petrol head in Kim Mordaunt's feisty film about Lebanese-Australian youth in Bankstown, *Jammin' in the middle E*, which was screened on SBS in February 2006. NOMISE also took part, along with BrothaBlack, Samoan performer Leo Tanoi and Torres Strait Islander actor Aaron Fa'Aoso, in *Back home*, a powerful theatrical exploration of masculinity directed by Alicia Talbot which Urban Theatre Projects produced at the 2006 Sydney Festival. Audiences were bussed from the Riverside Theatre in Parramatta, along with an Aboriginal guide, to an outdoor theatre at the Oakhurst Neighbourhood Centre, on traditional land of the Dharug people. There the stage was set for a backyard barbecue where the four men have a party, perform songs and raps, and gradually reveal their shattered lives to one another.

Hip hop has played a strong educational role in Aboriginal communities. In 1999 MunkiMark and Brotha Black joined forces with Morganics in 'Desert Rap', a three week workshop with Aboriginal young people in Alice Springs which was set up by Triple J's Top End correspondent Tony Collins. The workshops were the subject of a documentary film broadcast on the ABC, featuring, among other elements, a brilliant performance from Swanz, an all-female crew, of a track called 'Brown Skinned Black Woman'.⁹ The facilitators insisted on no American accents, or as Mark puts it, 'don't be a yo yo',¹⁰ and participants were encouraged to find their own voice, their own accent, their own language. This led to a number of other similar 'desert rap'-styled workshops, including 'Hip Hop Up Top' in 2001, which Collins also set up, working with Aboriginal young people in Darwin and Arnhem Land. At times Morganics and

8. See Stevenson and Tavros 2005: 7. The article tries to suggest that murdered MC Tupac Shakur and US gangsta rap – a genre which died out around 1995 – were inspirations for 'a very ugly manifestation of cultural chauvinism' displayed by Lebanese-Australian youths in the Cronulla riots.

9. Collins 2000.

10. Interview with MunkiMark, conducted by Tony Mitchell, Alastair Pennycook and Nick Keys, 4 November 2005, Klub Koori, Sydney University.

MonkiMark have found themselves working with young Aboriginals for whom English is their fifth language.

US and local influences

In their all-too-brief section on Aboriginal hip hop in *Deadly sounds, deadly places: contemporary Aboriginal music in Australia*, Peter Dunbar-Hall and Chris Gibson suggest that the 'black transnationalism' of African-American hip hop, especially those few artists who sought to make connections with Aboriginal communities when they toured Australia, was a decisive factor in the development of hip hop by Aboriginal practitioners. They quote MC Lez Beckett:

before Australian and Aboriginal hip hop really took off, we [Aboriginal youth] all followed what the Americans did. It really influenced me because it was a black face on television, and when you are a young fulla growing up in Cunnamulla in central Queensland, it is a pride thing to see another blackfella in a position of power.¹¹

African-American hip hop artists who influenced MunkiMark include 'old school' crews and MCs like Run DMC, the Sugar Hill Gang and Grandmaster Flash, along with Public Enemy and Ice T — both of whom he has met up with in Sydney several times — and the 'speed rap' of Fu Schnickens. But he reserves a special place for 'conscious' MC Michael Franti of Spearhead, and formerly the Disposable Heroes of Hiphocrisy, a fairly regular visitor to Redfern over the past decade. Like Franti, Mark sometimes plays acoustic guitar when he raps, and a number of other Aboriginal MCs such as Lez Beckett, Brotha Black, the Sydney-based rapper MC Wire, aka Will Jarratt, a Gumbayngirri descendant from Bowraville, and political femcee Jakalene Extreme (also known as Shazza on the SBS comedy *Pizza*), do likewise. This suggests that the guitar-based country music embraced by Aboriginal people over the past half century may be just as influential on some hip hop by Aboriginal artists as the hip hop of their African-American counterparts. It is also one aspect of the way in which Aboriginal MCs are referring to the historical development of Aboriginal culture in Australia in their own indigenous lyrical poetics and signposts.

Klub Koori

Many of the prominent Aboriginal hip hop artists of recent times took part in Klub Koori, a showcase for Aboriginal hip hop which was organised by Koori Radio and the Gadigal Information Service at the Manning Bar at Sydney University in November 2005. Performers included Ebony Williams, a descendant of the Wirdjuri Tribe, who also has African-American parentage, and got her start at age 15 in 'Hip Hopera' in 1995 in a duo called Two Indij. She opened her performance with 'And the Beat Goes On', a track first released in 2003 on a compilation put out by the Sydney-based Mother Tongues collective, which claims to be the only all-women hip hop label in the world. Ebony's assertion of Aboriginal rights speaks of a history of denial:

As a young black woman / I have to make my point more stronger / So it'll encourage others to recognise / They're part of what we've been denied for many years / As hip hop makes me stronger / Hopefully you will understand you have

¹¹. Lez Beckett cited in Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004: 123.

to wake up / If you want something before you're left behind ... Don't let your dreams dry like glue / Stick with it!¹²

She followed this with 'You Never Seem to Understand Me', which dates back to Hip Hopera days, a more personal track about family discord, which like Munki Mark, seeks solace in the Dreamtime:

Family is family, so why the fighting / Our race should stick together / When families are uniting / That's what our elders are stressing to us / As they teach and explain / The ways of the Dreamtime.¹³

'Open Up Your Mind' is a track with a didjeridu riff from 1999, which starts its history lesson 200 years ago with the white invasion of Australia and its traumatic consequences for Aboriginal people, including the stolen children. The final two verses are a sustained 'diss' of Pauline Hanson:

You're trying to hold my people to ransom / Dancing with the devil, Pauline Hanson / ... She don't like my people / In her eyes they're never going to be equal ... Wanting me to feel out of place in my own country ... A high profile trouble maker / Go back to selling fish in your stupid shop!¹⁴

BrothaBlack then stated his aim is to 'put my people on the map'. As he has said 'I started out by trying to imitate Chuck D [of Public Enemy] and people like that. Listening to rap music was just part of my everyday life.'¹⁵ More recently, he came to the defence of his workshop cohort Morganics when the latter was attacked on the Vibe Aboriginal and Aussie Hip Hop forum as 'wack cant rap an need to stop messin up our kids by tryin 2 teach them to rap, gubba tryin 2 teach black music? [sic]' BrothaBlack's response spoke for the hundreds of Aboriginal MCs Morganics has tutored:

that's my boy you're talking about (Morganics) so what if he's white he's doing good in our community, which is a lot more I can say than what other people are doing at the moment. If you going to put him down you have got a few more people to have a go at because there's quite a few white fullas in Aboriginal music and not just Hip Hop (Think about it). If you think he's in it for the money and Kudos your wrong I can back that up 100%.¹⁶

In 'Brotha's Back' he gives 'shout outs' to Condell Park and Bankstown, acknowledging the historical origins of Aboriginal hip hop in Sydney. A group of Koori women is dancing to his beats as smoke billows through the red, blue and green lights. A scratch DJ goes into action as BrothaBlack raps 'This is more than history, it's my identity / A new generation, the indigenous nation / Calling out to my people ... We fight for the rights of our population.'¹⁷

12. Various artists 2000; Various artists 2003.

13. Various artists 2000; Various artists 2003.

14. Various artists 2000; Various artists 2003.

15. *Koori Mail*, 27 November 2002: 33, cited in Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004: 123.

16. Vibe Forum — Aboriginal and Aussie Hip Hop http://deadlys.vibe.com.au/forum/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=108 (Accessed 6/9/05).

17. 'Brotha's Back' is on the Triple J compilation *The Hip Hop Show*, Warner/ABC Music 2005, as is Local Knowledge's 'Murri Flows'.

For his last number he is joined by Ozi Battla, an Anglo MC from militant multi-cultural Sydney hip hop crew the Herd, the two MCs gripping each other's hands in solidarity as they swap rhymes.

Local Knowledge: Blackfellas in the house

Lez ('Bex') Beckett's set is heralded by two didgeridu players and traditional dancers in bodypaint, tracing the movements of kangaroos, among other gestures, demonstrating the adaptability of hip hop into traditional Aboriginal storytelling and dance. Beckett, a veteran of numerous educational hip hop workshops which involve teaching English to Aboriginal youth through hip hop, performs tracks from his new EP, *We Were Soldiers*, and there is even more dancing now. But the act everyone is waiting for is Local Knowledge. As Joel Weintraub, originally from the Kabi Kabi tribe in south-east Queensland, MC with Local Knowledge and lecturer in Health Sciences at Newcastle University, told Australian Music Online, Local Knowledge is primarily 'about getting young blackfella mob back into their culture and teaching our history through music'.¹⁸ Their track 'Blackfellas', for which they completed a video in Redfern in October 2005, was on high rotation on Triple J for two months, and is the feature track of their debut EP, which they have been selling at gigs, and has already gone into a second pressing.¹⁹ It starts with a shout out to all the Aboriginal groups throughout Australia: Kooris, Murris, Noongah, etc. They sometimes even throw in 'Maori', in commemoration of the numerous Maori immigrants in Australia and the Indigenous Down Under workshops they did with Maori crew Upper Hutt Posse in Wellington, Aotearoa, in 2003. The video shows them driving through Redfern with tribal names tattooed on their arms, in a style more reminiscent of the Maori film *Once were warriors* than US gagsta rap. As group member Abie Wright told me, they are influenced by Maori and Pacific Islander hip hop like Nesian Mystik, Che Fu and Upper Hutt Posse: 'Upper Hutt Posse are deadly lads and they are pretty staunch about their culture, their history and their identity, and they stand up and say what needs to be said, which is basic human rights as far as they are concerned.' Wright is also an aficionado of Crump, 'Dirty Southern' hip hop from the Mississippi as practiced by Lil' Jon and the East Side Boys. As he explains:

it's a form of hip hop, but it's repetitive with lots of screaming. It's sort of like Zulu chanting, with a heavy bass going through it. To us it's like when we were sitting around singing corroboree songs. Them fellas with their Zulu chants and us fellas with our old people sitting around and stomping on the ground 'boom boom boom', it saves us from letting our aggression out through our fists.²⁰

This undercurrent of anger comes out in 'Who's Gonna Stop Me' from the EP — a track based on an incident where some Aboriginal people were barred from a nightclub in Newcastle, referred to as 'savages' and refused to take it lying down. The chorus, 'Who's gonna stop me — Nobody!' is repeated with increasing intensity until the track finally winds down into slow motion. Brothers Abie and Wok Wright both have a background in rugby league and traditional Aboriginal dance; as Wok says:

18. Interview with Joel Weintraub, Australian Music Online, 12 December 2005 www.amo.org/au/qa_interview.asp?id1054.ott.gen.muso (accessed 24/12/05).

19. Local Knowledge 2005.

20. Interview with Local Knowledge, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, October 2005, Manning Bar, Sydney University.

Me and Abie laugh about it a lot because we try and structure our shows like we used to structure our corroboree shows. We'd start out with a bang, with a spectacular dance, and then we'd slow it down in tempo, then we'd do a strong dance, a slow one, and then we'd go into something leftfield — a hitch hiker's story on a didjeridu.²¹

Tonight they begin with their website back-projected on a large screen, featuring the group surrounded by flames, accompanied by series of heroic brass fanfares, and a rather drawn-out fire-making ceremony. Then the three of them leap onto the stage, jumping up and down, left arms whirling in unison, right hands gripping their mics, goading the audience into action — 'Are you ready to rumble? We'll shake the world!' They perform the tracks 'Rumble' and 'Murri Flows' off the EP, with some didjeridu accompaniment, and hit their peak in a triumphant version of 'Blackfellas' which has everyone up on the dancefloor. They're playing down the more educational side of their repertoire tonight — health promotion songs about alcoholism and sexually transmitted diseases, for example — in favour of the less confrontational and more 'feelgood' tracks. As Wok explains:

A lot of our early stuff was just rapping about straight-up, hardcore issues, about the stolen generation, about being hassled by coppers, all that sort of stuff. We just wanted to make the kids know that there is still a lot of work to be done, and we can't lose them to drugs and alcohol, just to tell them they do have a role to play.²²

This side of the group was shown on the 2004 SBS 'Blaktrax' program, *Local Knowledge: the message*, which provided a useful background to the group's development as an educational crew in Aboriginal communities since they formed in March 2002, as well as the way they use Aboriginal English and diss American 'wannabees'.²³ But as Wok emphasises, there is a negative side to the educational aspects of hip hop which sometimes conflicts with its enjoyment:

I like the more commercial stuff to be honest, the feelgood stuff, just because I don't like reminding the kids of how when they get home from school, there is no food, dad's hitting mum, mum's hitting dad, so they go into their room and put music on, they don't want to hear anyone singing about that. They want to go on a journey with their music. So that's one thing we do, the easy going feel, but we have a bit of a go at everything — Abie likes his crump, Joel's a straight hip hop lover, as well as reggae and ragga.²⁴

Weintraub emphasises the popularity of hip hop in Aboriginal communities as well as its similarity to existing Aboriginal traditions of song and dance:

In our communities storytelling, music, dance, creative arts are the only form of communication, it's the way we've passed on our knowledge, and that's one of the big reasons hip hop is huge in Aboriginal communities. There isn't one Aboriginal kid who doesn't like hip hop because it's that oral communication that

21. Interview with Local Knowledge, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, October 2005, Manning Bar, Sydney University.

22. Interview with Local Knowledge, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, October 2005, Manning Bar, Sydney University.

23. Flanders 2004.

24. Interview with Local Knowledge, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, October 2005, Manning Bar, Sydney University.

we've been used to over thousands and thousands of years. And you can also dance to it, which is a bonus!²⁵

One educational project which Local Knowledge was involved in is 'Young, Black + Deadly', a series of workshops in all genres of music in a variety of Sydney locations for young Koori musicians. This was organised by the Gadigal Information Service and culminated in concert finales at the Enmore Theatre and CD releases. As Abie Wright has stated, 'YBD is our way of making sure that Koori music and young Koori artists keep developing through to the next generations. It's our traditional way of teaching'.²⁶

The Aboriginal hip hop legacy continues

Local Knowledge's recent success has drawn attention to the increasing number of younger Aboriginal hip hop practitioners, especially in Brisbane, who are using hip hop to explore their own identity and to get in touch with traditional aspects of their culture. Indigenous Intrudaz, a trio from Glenala State High, were nominated for a 2005 MusicOz award in hip hop, and their track 'Clap Your hands', about growing up on the wrong side of the tracks in Brisbane, was a finalist in Triple J's Unearthed competition. MC Murriz, a teenage trio, released an EP, *Ain't No Suckers*, in 2004, which expressed pride in their Aboriginal heritage as well as in Brisbane, and brought them radio airplay, particularly for their track '2Black 2Strong'. They have performed at Brisbane's Stylin' Up festival, which has been something of a showcase for recent Aboriginal hip hop, including groups like MIZ, a female duo who consist of Torres Strait-born Sarah Patrick and Seychelles-born Marsha Chang-Tave. MIZ's track 'Where It's At' had Triple J airplay. MC Dizzy, aka Charmaine Doolan, is a Townsville-born Murri now based in Brisbane.

But the senior exponents of Brisbane Aboriginal hip hop are undoubtedly Native Rhyme Syndicate, who formed in 1994, and were nominated for two Deadly Awards in 1998. One of the group's members, Daniel 'DK' Kinchela, comes from the Gummilaroi clan and is a cousin of Wok and Abie Wright's as well as lead MC with a new crew, Tribal S.U.N.S regime. Native Rhyme's main MC, Cameron 'C-Roc' Callope, is from the Gkuthaarn clan in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and was appointed an elder of his clan for the work he has done in educating Aboriginal youth through hip hop. The group started recording in 1998 on a compilation called *Emerging Artists* with a cover of 'Chain Remains' by African-American hip hoppers, Naughty By Nature, whom they played support for in Brisbane. They followed that with 'Together', a collaboration with Kev Carmody and the Cruel Sea on the 2003 *Corroboration* compilation. 'We'll Always Love you' is a memorial for a dead friend, which was included on the 2004 Redhotgreenblack environmental awareness compilation *UnAustralian*. The Rockhampton-based Torres Strait Islander crew Stray Dogs have also celebrated their heritage with a track called 'Saltwater People'.

In Melbourne, Little G, also known as the Wogarigine, due to her mixed Greek and Aboriginal background (her real name is Georgina Christanthopoulos), illustrates the crossover between Aboriginal and multicultural hip hop. This also occurs in Perth

²⁵. Interview with Local Knowledge, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, October 2005, Manning Bar, Sydney University.

²⁶. Young Indigenous artists from NSW 2005.

crew Downsyde, whose members come from Aboriginal, Middle Eastern, South American and other backgrounds. Little G, as George Stavrias has noted in his 2003 Honours thesis at Melbourne University, has written and performed tracks about Aboriginal deaths in custody as well as the Yorta Yorta tribe, which she initially believed was where her mother came from, until she discovered otherwise. As Stavrias points out, Little G's 'entry into hip hop occurred simultaneously with her desire to learn about her Aboriginal heritage'.²⁷ She started exploring her Aboriginal side after she began taking lessons in Aboriginal Cultural Studies from an elder, but her negotiation of her Aboriginal identity was a complex and difficult process, compounded by her mixed heritage and involving a great deal of anger as she learned about past massacres and the treatment of Aboriginal people throughout Australian history. Hip hop became a means of channeling this anger, as well as encouraging younger Aboriginals to be proud of their heritage. As she has said:

Hip hop for me is like another form of boxing, except lyrically ... The young people will not learn through schools to be proud of themselves, so if we can do it through music, or film, or art, that's the right choice.²⁸

Little G was one of the protagonists of MC Que and Colleen Hughson's 2004 film *All the Ladies*, which profiled six Australian women MCs, most of whom come from mixed non-Anglo heritages, and she sometimes performs with Melbourne multicultural groups Curse ov Dialect and TZU. Nonetheless she feels doubly marginalised from much of the Melbourne hip hop scene due to her identification with her Aboriginal heritage, and her association with 'conscious' or 'felafel' rap:

You get the ockers, the wogs, the felafel rappers which is us, you know on the outside, the bloody hippies. I don't ever think I'll be accepted by everyone, because I'm indigenous, and they're all gonna always compare me with overseas.²⁹

Stavrias concludes his study, which also contains a chapter on Morganics and MC Wire, with the following statement. It demonstrates the importance of hip hop as a means of helping Aboriginal youth to negotiate their identities and to connect with traditional forms of culture, as well as continuing storytelling traditions:

Negotiating tradition and modernity, Aboriginal culture is actually a culture in the making and hip hop is a powerful tool in helping Aboriginal youth with this negotiation. Sampling and representin', characteristics which ground it in the local, allow traditional sounds into the music, traditional dances into the breakdancing, and traditional values and language into the raps. The rap itself enacts traditional knowledge through storytelling. Yet hip hop as a medium for identity recognition is not limited by its attachment to traditional forms. Inspired by the African American oppositional politics it provides an avenue for Aboriginal youth to discuss their concerns in a manner that is not only fashionable, but also empowering. Importantly, it is energised by that key ingredient for youth and children — having fun.³⁰

27. Stavrias 2003: 17.

28. Interview with Little G, conducted by Colleen Hughson (Hughson and Quinsacara 2003).

29. Stavrias 2003: 24.

30. Stavrias 2003: 50.

MC Wire: the modern day corroboree

Hip hop's connections with traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island culture are perhaps best expressed by MC Wire, who told Moses Iten in 2003:

This is my lyrical healing. I can't go and get scarred any more and I can't become a traditional man. I'm a modern day blackfella, this is still Dreamtime for me. Hip hop is the new clapsticks, hip hop is the new corroboree.³¹

Wire was the subject of a personal documentary-essay film by Australian Film, Television and Radio School graduate Grant Leigh Saunders in 2005 entitled *B.L.A.C.K.: an Aboriginal song of hip hop*, which takes its title from what is probably the best-known track performed by Wire, and is also an anagram for 'Born Long Ago Creation's Keeper'.³² In the track Wire interrogates what being black means to him today, regarding it as a positive thought process through which he explores his own identity and relates it to Aboriginal history and tradition, including contemplating the Aboriginal massacres of the past. As he explains:

It's not just my skin colour, for even the blackest brother can be white. You see black is a thought process, for me a way of life. To be black is to be free, free from the heart, free from the head. Free to take that man for what he is, free to choose and make my own decisions.³³

Wire usually reverses his name to Wire MC, where 'MC' does not stand for the usual 'Master of Ceremonies or 'Microphone Chief', but rather 'My Cousin', emphasizing Aboriginal family connections. He appropriates hip hop into Aboriginal culture as a 'modern day corroboree':

It's still the same corroboree, still singing and dancing and telling the same stories about the immediate environment. So it's not a new corroboree, it's just a modern day corroboree. It's still an old art form — for want of a better term.³⁴

In his track 'B.L.A.C.K.' (Born Long Ago Creation's Keeper), which he performed *a cappella* for me during an interview in Victoria Park, Sydney, as no recorded version of it exists, he is explicit about hip hop's resonances with Aboriginal traditions:

I feel a rhythm in the forest and it's totally bliss,
Words float like a mist through a valley that's thick,
Memories of corroboree, didjeridu and clapstick,
Melaleuca and the eucalypt to cure the sick,

From a mountain to the ocean flows a river through the forest,
Running naked through the bush like the ancient ones before us,
I can hear the chorus of the corroboree calling me,
Yes I am the fruit of the Murabi tree see,

I often wonder what my name would have been,
Living in the dreamtime with my ancient tribal kin,

31. Iten 2003: 78-81.

32. Saunders 2005.

33. MC Wire, quoted in Message Stick http://www.abc.net.au/message/radio/away/ms_opera/music_mewire (accessed 26/12/05).

34. Interview with MC Wire, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, 31 March 2006, Victoria Park, Sydney.

Hunting and gathering, living this way,
Playing tribal rhythms through the night and into day.

But reality cuts, interrupts my fantasy,
As I casually step into the jungle of humanity,
Maintain my sanity while I'm constantly under the scrutiny
Of Police and Security, they shooting me

But don't be stupid see, stereotyping is just like executing me.

It's a modern day corroboree, you know how we do,
Shake a leg, lift your head, represent, stay true,
Brother stay black, sister stay beautiful,
Let 'em know that you be Aboriginal and proud,
Right now no shame in here,
Lights out, flash black, I'm bringing flame this year,
The sounds you hear right now is right here and now
And I'm here right now, it's the brand new brown.³⁵

Wire also refers to himself as an 'abo-digital' MC in a way which combines modern digital music technology with traditional Aboriginal handcrafts. His capacity to rap outdoors without any technological support embodies his connection with traditional storytelling:

'abo-digital' has an ambiguous meaning because of the word digital. I'm abo-digital because I'm a twenty-first century Aboriginal, I'm down with laptops and mobile phones and home entertainment. But digital also means your hands and your fingers, so I'm still putting my fingers in the dirt; I'm still using my hands to create things. So that's the ambiguity.³⁶

Saunders' film incorporates clips of footage of Local Knowledge, 'The Block', a track about Redfern devised by Morganics with young Aboriginal pupils from Fort Street school, MC Murriz's '2Black 2 Strong', as well as the pre-teen Morganics-produced Wilcannia Mob's celebrated 2002 track 'Down River'. He explores his own personal history as a fair skin Koori in the film through hip hop, 'which gave me back what they stole from my past'. He also traces a history of Aboriginal hip hop back to the 'old school breakers' of 1982, interviewing Leonie Morcombe (aka Leapy), Ralph Saunders and Sean Choolburra, who reinforce the importance of the 'no shame factor' of breakdancing and its expression of the centrality of dance to Aboriginal culture. He namechecks B Boys Venom, 2 Ezy, Lama Rock, Dougan, Ninginaas and DJ Vilas, who like many other B girls and B boys around the world were greatly influenced by the Rock Steady Crew, a group with a high proportion of Latino Americans rather than African Americans. In the film Wire also explains the predominant focus of Aboriginal hip hop on MC-ing and breakdancing rather than DJ-ing and graffiti by the fact that most Aboriginal hip hoppers can't afford turntables, and Aboriginal graffiti artists 'would just get locked up for life'. He adds that hip hop is his own way of sublimating feelings of anger and frustration, echoing Little G and Local Knowledge: 'If I didn't put

35. Interview with MC Wire, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, 31 March 2006, Victoria Park, Sydney.

36. Interview with MC Wire, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, 31 March 2006, Victoria Park, Sydney.

pen to pad, I could be putting fist to face.' And he has also pointed out a significant difference between Aboriginal hip hop and Australian hip hop, and implicitly US hip hop:

The difference I find between Aboriginal hip hop and white Australian hip hop [is that] we have a deep innate sense of community obligation, we are born with it, and that's why you don't hear black MC's - I can say all of the ones I've come across - using words like 'bitches', they won't diss women. Because my mum isn't a bitch, my grandma isn't a bitch, and the mother the land ain't a bitch. You know what I'm saying, that's a big dividing line ... I find Australian hip hop is too pre-occupied with getting mainstream support. For myself personally, I don't give a fuck about mainstream support because I come from a place where the mainstream has never supported me anyway. And I don't do this to advance hip hop, I do it to advance myself as a human and as an Aboriginal, advance the awareness of my culture, especially on a contemporary tip.³⁷

As an educational format, a vehicle to express anger at discrimination and marginalisation and pride in one's heritage, a way of binding communities together through dance and performance, a declamatory form of storytelling set to music, and above all a means of expressing oral history, hip hop's affinities with Aboriginal cultural forms make it an ideal means for youth to get in touch with their tribal identity, history and cultural background. It is also a vital means of articulating their place in today's world and expressing an epistemology; as Wire has stated: 'There are ... literacy skills involved if you want to rap or write. It's also a form of education for yourself, self-knowledge.'³⁸

From its origins in toasting and sound systems in Jamaica in the 1970s, hip hop has been extensively globalised and indigenised in a plethora of contexts, in the process of being incorporated into local languages and cultural forms. In Greenland, the Inuit crew Nuuk Posse rap in a mixture of Greenlandish, Danish and English, and incorporate whale songs and throat singing into their hip hop. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Te Kupu and the Upper Hutt posse perform and record in the Maori language and sample pre-European Maori musical instruments such as the *purerehua* (bull roarer), while Feel Style raps in Samoan. In Argentina, El Sindicato Argentino del Hip Hop express 'blood, sweat and rage' about issues such as money and the hard times their country is experiencing.³⁹

Its appropriation into the world's oldest living form of traditional culture was inevitable. As Wire put it: 'Hip hop is a part of Aboriginal culture, I think it always has been.'⁴⁰

37. Interview with MC Wire, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, 31 March 2006, Victoria Park, Sydney.

38. Interview with MC Wire, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, 31 March 2006, Victoria Park, Sydney.

39. Sindicato Argentino del Hip Hop 2005. Apart from the title track, this CD contains tracks entitled 'El Dinero' (Money) and 'Tiempos Dificiles' (Hard Times).

40. Interview with MC Wire, conducted by Nick Keys and Tony Mitchell, 31 March 2006, Victoria Park, Sydney.

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Culture Cullt Clan 2001: comments on the survival of Torres Strait culture

Janice Peacock

Introduction

As an Indigenous female artist of Torres Strait Islander descent, born in Mareeba, North Queensland and raised in Brisbane, my artwork addresses, often in a satirical vein, various historical themes and some misconceptions about the survival of Torres Strait culture. This is influenced by the fact that many people are unaware of how much of Torres Strait Islander traditional culture has survived, and how deeply it influences contemporary Torres Strait Islander artists' sensibility and practice.

For almost 150 years since European invasion and rule, Australia's Indigenous Torres Strait Islanders have survived occupation, attempted genocide and powerful pressures to conform to Eurocentric lifestyles. These alienate us and are devoid of what could enable us to sustain traditional links to our histories, our seas and our lands. Nonie Sharp, sociologist and chronicler of the 'hidden history' of the Torres Strait clarifies this further when she states:

Alongside the belief that Islanders had no socially relevant pre-colonial past lay a complementary assumption: that they could make no claim to an independent history since the arrival of those who took on the role of their rulers. According to that conception, the history of Torres Strait since conquest is solely one of attempts to change and 'develop' Islanders. For them history was now 'frozen': they were simply men and women conforming to a pattern of assimilation. Social reality was so constructed for them that they appeared as faceless figures in an alien world. They were not making history; it was being made *for* them.¹

I reflect on this statement when discussing the background and formation of my art installation in this paper. The installation, entitled *Culture Cullt Clan 2001*, was created in response to the work of the anthropologist Roger Sandall, and his comments about the primitiveness of Indigenous cultures. According to Sandall, Indigenous cultures have nothing to offer the modern world and need to reach 'civilisation' through 'assimilation' and the 'acquisition of the rules of civil society'.²

1. Sharp 1980: 12.

2. Interview with Roger Sandall 2001, ABC Radio National.

Exchanging histories

As an Indigenous female of Torres Strait Islander descent, born and brought up on the mainland of Australia, I am connected with, and affected by, wider Australian Indigenous issues, particularly those resulting from the alienation and dislocation stemming from colonialism. In this paper, the terms 'dislocation' and 'alienation' are applied specifically to dispossession from traditional lands, and not to the movement of non-Indigenous populations throughout the period of imperialist colonial expansion. These themes are a reflection of my own background of alienation and dislocation from my Torres Strait Islander roots and homeland.

Like many Torres Strait Islanders of my generation, I am of multi-ethnic descent: Sri Lankan, Danish, Indonesian, Irish and English. Having multiple heritages is a feature of my identity and ultimately influences how my work is perceived. My own art practice has been strongly influenced by Torres Strait Islander visual/performance artists like Destiny Deacon, Clinton Nain and Ken Thaiday Snr (all originating from Erub) and Ellen Jose, each of whom has elaborated those aspects of Indigenous identity and culture which speak most personally to them and their particular talents. Another major influence on the content and production of my artworks since 2000 has been the processes involved in Cuban born artist Coco Fusco's art performances, and her sardonic commentaries on Western concepts of the exotic and the primitive Other.³

I do not see myself as representative of Torres Strait Islander people, and my views reflect:

an individual consciousness, rather than a community consciousness, to express issues such as the search for identity and the effects of political, colonial and religious limitations [and convictions], on the lives of Torres Strait Islanders and other Indigenous people.⁴

My artworks interweave and juxtapose European and Torres Strait historical and cultural themes and perspectives. Discussing my work inevitably involves writing about and revisiting history as a means to explore my identity as a 21st century Torres Strait Island woman of multi-ethnic descent.

I strongly believe, based on my experience as an artist, that 'visual dialogue' is an expressive, persuasive, and often necessary, means to provide diverse ways of telling multiple histories. I also believe that the implications of contemporary historical practice and the potential these implications have to decolonise history, lie precisely in these many diverse interpretations, understandings and meanings of being 'Indigenous', for past, present and future generations.

Background to the work

The work which is the topic of this paper, *Culture Cullt Clan 2001*, is the response of a female urban mainland Torres Strait Islander to a persistent general belief, as expressed in the opening quote,⁵ that Islanders have no history. The work seeks to clarify 'old'

3. Fusco 1998: 363.

4. Torres Strait art in transition 2005; see also Mosby 1998b: 88.

5. Sharp 1980.

traditions, whilst adapting to a continually changing, globalised, technologically modern, 'new' world.

The underlying assumptions that Indigenous cultures are 'primitive' and doomed to extinction⁶ are based on now discredited anthropological notions of 'race' and the 'racial hierarchy'. However, some contemporary scholars appear to continue to hold such views, one being the anthropologist Roger Sandall. He writes:

The division is deep — there is a Big Ditch between the tribal world and modernity. Until around 1970 governments in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand accepted this fact, and they saw their duty as helping indigenes to cross the divide. For that reason they concentrated on better health, education, and housing, and let the chips of traditional culture fall where they may. That was how Western civilisation had dealt with its own traditions, creatively destroying those that would not change. Creative destruction is the law of historical advance.⁷

Culture Cullt Clan 2001 ('Cullt' as in 'Culled') was conceived and created as a pointed and playful response to Sandall's views.

Sandall's pronouncements about the 'primitive' character of Indigenous peoples first came to my notice in a newspaper article by Nicholas Rothwell.⁸ Sandall uses 'the big ditch' image to describe what he sees as the separation between modern democratic societies and the tribal worlds of Native Americans, Maori and Aborigines. He claims that views and proposals held by academics and anthropologists over the past 30 years belong to what he terms a 'culture cult' or 'designer tribalism'. Their views are to him 'romantic dreams running deep through the fabric of modern philosophy, social criticism and political thought', and suggests that 'you have to have an 18th century Enlightenment view and an anti-romantic temperament like his' to deal with the big ditch 'problem'.

If your traditional way of life has no alphabet, no writing, no books, and no libraries, and yet you are continually told that you have a culture which is 'rich', 'complex', and 'sophisticated', how can you realistically see your place in the scheme of things? If all such hyperbole were true, who would need books or writing? Why not hang up a 'Gone Fishing' sign and head for the beach?⁹

Sandall sees the current 'scheme of things' as justified by the possession and maintenance of an alphabet, books and libraries and that these are the measure of the worth of a culture/society. Those without such attributes are apparently unworthy of existence, have no place. In an interview on ABC radio he discussed the term 'civilisation'. For Sandall, 'civilisation' or 'civil society' is the 'proper conduct amongst equal citizens who set aside cultural difference': he gives us, as an example, a Sydney beach being occupied peaceably by people of many nationalities. This, he suggests, is 'part of the

6. Historian Russell McGregor comments on the doomed race theory as 'neither a sop for disturbed consciences nor an empirical demographic prediction' but more than anything else 'it was a manifestation of ultimate pessimism in Aboriginal abilities' (McGregor 1997: 18). Further discussion of this follows below.

7. Sandall 2001: 3.

8. Rothwell 2001.

9. Sandall 2001: 4.

entire story of civilisation'. He concludes that, to reach 'civilisation', Indigenous peoples need to cross the divide, his 'big ditch', which separates them from the modern world. This can be done through 'assimilation' and the 'acquisition of the rules of civil society'.¹⁰

According to Sandall, governments around the world saw it as their 'duty' to help Indigenous people to cross the 'big ditch', supposedly, to 'advance' them. In my view, this attribution of 'creative destruction' is paternalistic in that it generates a philanthropic view of how 'colonisers' operated upon first 'settlement' in previously inhabited lands. Sandall's view would imply that government legislation and policies such as the White Australia Policy and assimilation were introduced to *improve* Indigenous well-being. 'Historical advance' in Sandall's terms, is measured by a history that denies its true origins, as has now been made clear in such reports as 'Beyond the Act',¹¹ which was written and researched solely by Australian Indigenous people. It indicates the failure of most written accounts to give an accurate picture of early European 'settlement' in Queensland.

John Harris, in his revisionist history of Australian missions, *One Blood*, argues that 'civilisation' was constructed 'as a deadly force in itself'.¹² Harris gives examples of how 'civilisation' was implemented by colonisers who did their utmost to forcibly remove Indigenous inhabitants from their lands, without any remorse, concern or consideration towards them. He points out that authorities stole the land; they massacred, destroyed, and dismantled everything of value, to keep Indigenous people in jeopardy. Those who survived each bloody encounter were constituted (or 'imprisoned') as British subjects.¹³ Declaring war would mean recognising Aborigines as an invaded people rather than, as they were legally defined, 'British subjects', whose resistance to the British system of law became logically a 'criminal act' by 'outlaws'.¹⁴

Because British civilisation was deemed to be Christian civilisation, to be 'British' was to be a 'Christian'¹⁵ and vice versa. Therefore, 'civil life' was enforced as a means to 'Christianise' Indigenous people and make them 'abhor' their origins.¹⁶ Thus, contrary to Sandall's view, rather than be 'advanced', Australia's Indigenous peoples had to struggle to 'survive' beyond the brutalities that were forced upon them by settlers and colonisers.

According to Sandall, Western civilisation operates by '*creatively* destroying those that would not change'; moreover, he regards this 'creative destruction' as the law of historical '*advance*'. He uses these terms because he supposes that 'primitive' societies have nothing to offer modern or 'civil' society. In the introduction to his book, he states that 'most traditional cultures feature repression, economic backwardness, endemic disease, religious fanaticism, and severe artistic constraints'. He holds certain academic and media circles — which he claims give voice to the 'culture cult' — as responsible for

10. Interview with Roger Sandall, 25 June 2001, ABC Radio National.

11. Malezer 1979.

12. Harris 1990: 70.

13. Harris 1990: 72-73.

14. Malezer 1979: 9.

15. Harris 1990: 45.

16. Harris 1990: 44-45.

promoting 'noble savage' interpretations with regards to Indigenous people, and claims that 'they (the Culture Cult) haven't a clue what they are getting themselves into'.¹⁷

From an Indigenous viewpoint, both Sandall's views and the views he opposes are flawed. Moreover, it could be argued that Westerners' attempts to identify themselves with the plight of Indigenous peoples perpetuate conflicting but equally patronising and romantic views of Sandall's 'creative destruction'. Attempting to reconcile all of these viewpoints (and thinking that Sandall, too, could not see what he was 'getting [himself] into'), I was prompted to produce the *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* installation.

The work itself

The *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* installation comprises four separate glass cabinets, each containing a head-dress with corresponding items. Each is accompanied by an 'anthropological' document featuring a member of my family wearing a head-dress or armband, and a metal plaque engraved with a quote from Sandall's book.

Use of these quotes does not imply that Sandall is representative of all anthropological thought and practice, but it does draw attention to the fact that in the publication of Sandall's book in 2001, with its stereotypical indigenous inferences and references, influenced by paternalistic patterns and 18th century enlightenment views, these ideas are still actively circulating today. Thus, the installation represents my satirical responses to Sandall's work.

The work is centred on 'urban identity', as shown by the title *Culture Cullt Clan 2001*. This references the 'fragmentation' of Indigenous societies as a consequence of imperialism and colonisation — disconnection from our languages, histories, landscapes, social relations and our very way of thinking and interacting with the world. Museums have for centuries embodied that fragmentation, which is also why I place my work within that context.¹⁸ By doing this, I seek to explore how cultural items, and the people who created them, become 'objects': the museum context¹⁹ stresses the themes of 'alienation' and 'dislocation', which are the products of 'Imperialism's dehumanising imperatives'.²⁰

The need to consider an artefact within its cultural context, that is, within its own indigenous classificatory system, is vital for those items to retain their own cultural history and hence 'sovereignty'. So I present my culturally contemporary items within the present day relationships in which they belong, by placing them with photographs of my family members, taken in 2001, and the accompanying anthropological document with comments that respond to Sandall's quotes.

One glass cabinet in the installation series contains a 'satellite dish' head-dress, two 'scarification' armbands and a 'source stirrer' dance rattle. The satellite dish head-dress represents Torres Strait Islanders' sea life and their recognition of vast star sys-

17. Sandall 2001: viii-ix.

18. Smith 2003: 28.

19. Lawrence 1994: 337.

20. Smith 2003: 26.

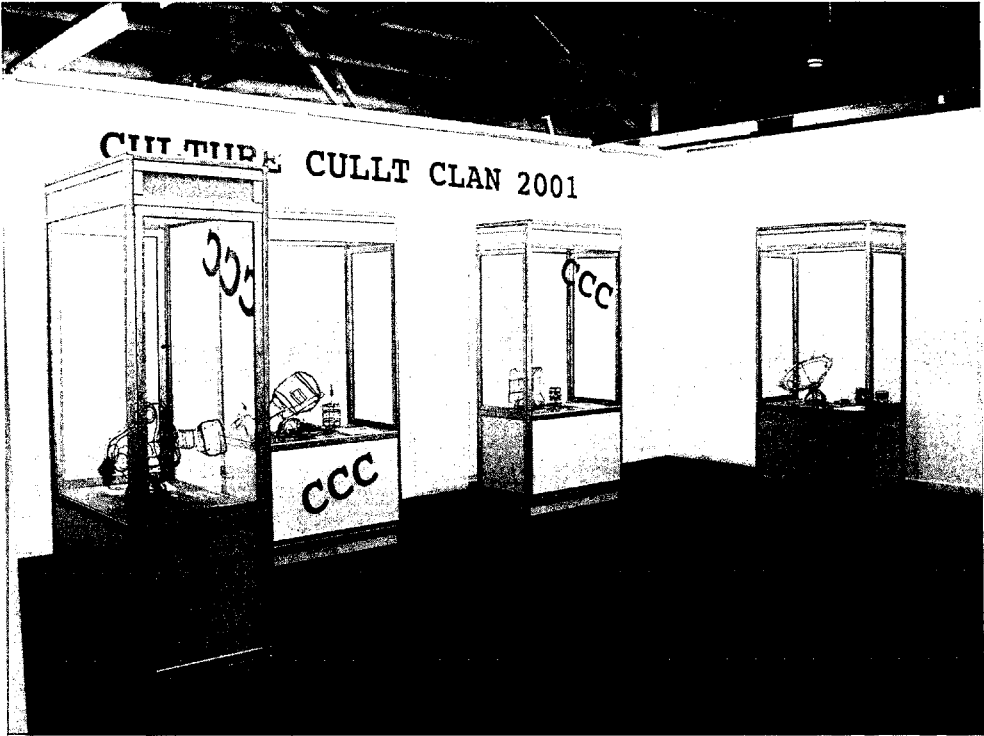


Fig 1 *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* (installation). Janice Peacock 2002. In 'Six coats of Black' (Camp-fire group exhibition), Fire-works Gallery, Brisbane. Photo: Elton Cole, courtesy of the author.

Clockwise: Movie Camera series: head-dress; film cartridge; dance rattle (dimensions vary); A4 document; engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm. Gone Fishing series: head-dress; armband; dance rattle (dimensions vary); A4 document; engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm. Laptop Computer series: head-dress; armband; dance rattle (dimensions vary); A4 document; engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm. Satellite Dish series: head-dress; armbands; dance rattle (dimensions vary); A4 document; engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm.

tems, which ultimately signal back to those living on the mainland in 'satellite' communities who are highly involved in the promotion of their culture.²¹ The spiral used in the centre of the satellite dish head-dress and accompanying armbands symbolises renewal of life, from the old to the new, and the changing of the seasons.²²

I use the photograph of my mother in the accompanying 'anthropological' document, together with the words 'creative destruction: historical genocide', to give recognition to my family's history, and our alienation from our Erub (Darnley Island) connection as a result of colonial intervention. However, through the creation of my artworks, which stems from a desire to reclaim my Torres Strait Islander identity and history, 'creative destruction' is transformed into 'creative adaptation'.

21. Bani 2000: 163.

22. Sharp 1993: 6.

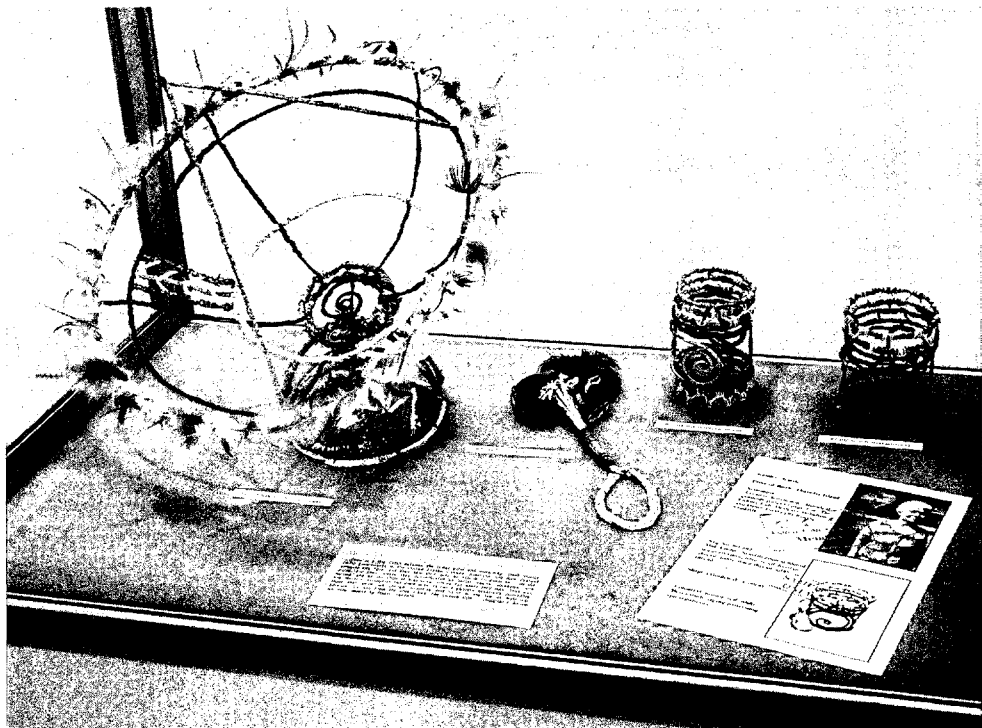


Fig 2 Satellite dish (installation component) in *Culture Cultt Clan 2001*. In 'Six coats of Black' (Camp-fire group exhibition), Fire-works Gallery, Brisbane. Photo: Elton Cole, courtesy of the author.

Satellite dish head-dress: wire, string, wool, feathers, seagrass, embroidery, cotton, 43 x 50 x 43cm. Scarification armbands: wire, string, wool, seagrass, embroidery cotton, 13 x 9 x 9cm, 10.5 x 9.5 x 10cm. Source stirrer's dance rattle: sauce stirrer, string, wool, feathers, seeds, seagrass, 33 x 9 x 9cm. Engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm; A4 size document. Janice Peacock 2002.

Hence my argument in this installation component is that the attempt by colonial government powers to destroy Australian Indigenous peoples' histories and cultures through 'creative destruction' could be termed 'historical genocide'; and that any 'historical advance' gained by Torres Strait Islanders was achieved not by white imperialist destruction but by Islanders' constant 'creative adaptation' through resistance to Western influences.

The hope was that Torres Strait Islanders would come to reflect the social make-up of the colonisers. The failure of Islanders to become replicas of those who appointed themselves to remould them baffled their rulers and interpreters alike.²³ The strength to resist arose from continuity of kinship ties and a strong cultural desire to survive and 'advance' by continuing to own their identity as Torres Strait Island people. The installation series under discussion turns on its head Sandall's view that assimilation and the 'acquisition of the rules of civil society' result in societal 'advance'.

²³ Sharp 1980: 69.

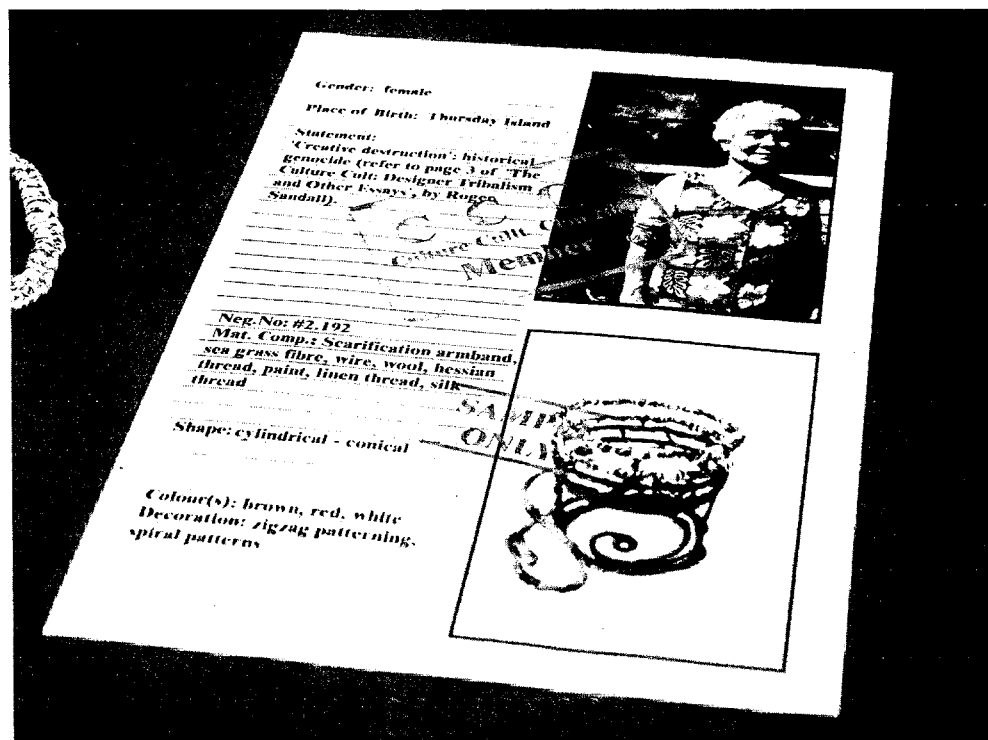


Fig 3 *Creative destruction: historical genocide*. Digitally enhanced A4 size document in Satellite dish series, *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* (installation). Janice Peacock 2002. (Digital imaging: Jason Castro Dooley. Photo: Janice Peacock.)

In 'Six coats of Black' (Camp-fire group exhibition), Fire-works Gallery, Brisbane. Photo: Elton Cole, courtesy of the author.

Claude Levi-Strauss, a leading figure of structuralist anthropology, holds that *differences* between cultures 'are extremely fecund'.²⁴ He believes that 'it is only through differences that progress has been made' and that 'in order for a culture to be really itself and to produce something, the culture and its members must be convinced of their originality'. Sandall's 'simplistic' ideal of 'setting cultural difference aside' ignores or dismisses the complexities that Levi-Strauss observes, which arise when living in a modern multicultural society.

This is a view shared by many Torres Strait people. For example, Torres Strait Islander academic, Professor Martin Nakata comments on how Torres Strait Islanders have 'an intellectual capacity that is equal to others. We have cultural knowledge, tradition and history that shape our world-view and constitute not inferiority, but distinctiveness and difference'.²⁵ And Auntie Flo Kennedy, a revered Torres Strait Island elder, is intensely aware that 'people who know their own ways can get on with other people who know theirs'.²⁶ She apprehends how the originality of our cultures

²⁴ Levi-Strauss cited in Sharp 1993: 90.

²⁵ Nakata 2004: 172.

²⁶ Kennedy cited in Sharp 1993: 90.

and, ultimately, what is 'culturally appropriate' for us, is essential to our being and our ways of relating to one another. She concludes that 'knowing who we are and where we come from is the essence of reciprocal interrelations between cultures'.²⁷ As Indigenous people, we understand that reciprocal relationships are the essential basis for living with others. Auntie Flo Kennedy's acceptance and recognition of a culturally diverse paradigm is borne out by the cultural diversity found in many contemporary Indigenous families,²⁸ including my own. Because 'knowing who I am and where I come from' is considered within Indigenous communities to be essential for reciprocal responses to others, reclaiming my 'being' through knowing my family's *ailan* history is for me the first step towards an appropriate art practice.

This, however, is not without its difficulties. Torres Strait curator, Tom Mosby, in discussing categories of 'otherness' describes a scene from the science fiction television series *Star Trek Deep Space Nine*, in which human skin colour is a non-issue and negation of the black-white inferiority-superiority dichotomy is transformed into a human versus non-human dichotomy.²⁹ Mosby then makes an analogy with what happens when Torres Strait Islander art is addressed within the concepts of Western art. He states that:

on the one hand, there is a concerted attempt to bring Indigenous art into the realm of the 'enlightened' Western art industry. Instead of looking at the differences, a search for affinity is attempted, in particular the search for a 'global stylistic pluralism'.³⁰

Levi-Strauss makes a related point regarding the danger of the 'over-communication of modern technology', which he fears brings with it 'the prospect of our being only consumers of other cultures' and thus 'losing all originality'.³¹

While acknowledging that there are a great variety of anthropological views on Indigenous societies and cultures, critiquing certain anthropological ideas and practices provides fertile material for, and is implicit within, all my artworks. Given that Western colonialist ideologies continue to distort indigenous representations, history and art, even where current attempts are made to counteract past discrepancies, my reclamation of my personal history from an Indigenous viewpoint must contest past non-acknowledgements, exclusions or misrepresentations, exemplified by Sandall's arguments.

Anthropology, art and art collecting in Torres Strait

The arrival of the London Missionary Society at Erub in 1871 was instrumental, not only in outlawing traditional customs and items of traditional worship but also in the dispersal of artefacts from the islands into overseas institutions. Between 1871 and 1910 missionaries bought and commissioned artefacts which were purchased by the British Museum, Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden, and the Royal Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.³² But the best-known collections of 19th century Torres Strait material remain those made by Haddon, which were distributed to Cambridge University and

27. Kennedy cited in Sharp 1993: 90.

28. Sharp 1993: 90.

29. Mosby 1998a: 79.

30. Mosby 1998a.

31. Levi-Strauss cited in Sharp 1993: 90.

32. Herle and Philp 2000: 157.

the British Museum, with smaller collections allocated to the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, and the Queensland Museum, Brisbane. Haddon's own views on art are interesting in this context. The connection between European materialism and social science is pointed out by Sharp: 'Generally speaking, the societies which have moulded the consciousness of the social scientist, are those in which commodity production is universal'.³³

So it was with the arrival in Torres Strait of AC Haddon, first in 1888,³⁴ and ten years later in 1898 as leader of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition³⁵ that 'the chips of [Torres Strait Islanders'] traditional culture' would consequently 'fall where they may', that is into anthropological hands.³⁶ The expedition would prove to be a turning point in Torres Strait history and the history of British anthropology, setting a local precedent for a strange (to Islanders) scientific world of documentation, objectivity and the absolute.³⁷

The importance of Haddon's work cannot be underestimated, in terms of his handling of the multidisciplinary team he had chosen, who devised and developed new techniques for extracting, recording and analysing the anthropological and ethnographical information they gathered. The first use of moving film in Australia as an aid to ethnographical fieldwork was Haddon's filming of a re-enactment (proposed by Haddon) of a Malo ceremonial dance by Murray Islanders in 1898 (Saunders 2001: 59). This motivated me to create a 'movie camera' head-dress, with accompanying items, in one component of the *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* installation series (see fig 4).

Haddon's definition of ethnography was as 'a branch of anthropology concerned with the scientific description of a human society'.³⁸ This did not preclude his team members from having remarkably friendly interactions with the Torres Strait Islanders. Moore states that:

Haddon was distinguished from any of his predecessors, as allying a strong belief in the importance of scientifically based field-work and possessing a deep humanity and total lack of condescension towards his fellow men.³⁹

A certain sentimentality can be found in Haddon's 1898 diary entries: on leaving Thursday Island for what he thought would be the last time, he writes that it is 'as if parting from a close personal friend whom I shall never see again'.⁴⁰ He did in fact

33. Sharp 1980: 14.

34. Haddon was then Professor of Zoology at the Royal College of Science, Dublin. He visited the Torres Strait to study the marine biology of the reef systems there. Working mostly with the local inhabitants, he became fascinated with the people and ended up spending as much time collecting traditional artefacts as he did working on reef biology (Moore 1984: 10–11).

35. The expedition included scholars in the fields of ethnology, psychology, medicine and linguistics and also had expertise in music, art and photography. Its members spent approximately seven months in Torres Strait, with further comparative research in Cape York and New Guinea before returning to England (Herle 1998: 114). Haddon also returned to the Torres Strait in 1914.

36. Sandall 2001: 3.

37. I use the term 'absolute' here to refer to the knowledge obtained by white occupiers, in this case by the anthropologists, being seen as the 'only' truth (Smith 1999: 67).

38. Saunders 2001: 59.

39. Moore 1984: 12.

return in 1914, and remained in contact with his Torres Strait Islander friends for the remainder of his life. In similar vein, the Islanders whom Haddon studied and befriended displayed their own 'deep humanity' by their reciprocal response and respect for him.

However, in accordance with previous discussion to do with anthropological exploration, Sharp observes that since colonial invasion and settlement, the 'right' of the social scientist to study the people of pre-modern societies remained part of an unbalanced power situation. She states that:

it is usually inconceivable that the object of study will be free to say 'no'. Where his or her work is tied to a form of policy science whereby the social scientist acting as social engineer chooses a set of procedures in order to determine the instrumentally best course of action necessary to implement a decision, the consequences are likely to be fateful for the society which is studied. For the decisions to be made are part of the unfolding of that reality which has been created for the objects of study. Under these conditions a so-called value-free study becomes continuous and enmeshed with the social situation of capture and control.⁴¹

An accomplice in this process is perhaps Westerners' obsession with collecting authentic objects to be preserved for the future, and is tied up with nationalist politics and national identity formation.⁴² Whilst this ensured the preservation of objects for over 100 years, it also ensured their disconnection from the communities that created them. Hence the vast documentation of Islanders' traditional life and customs and the over 1,000 artefacts collected by the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition served as evidence of Westerners' 'historical advance' over 'primitive' races.⁴³

One result was the six-volume *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits*.⁴⁴ A descriptive catalogue of the artefacts collected, published by David Moore in 1984, has since made previously unphotographed and inaccessible material available to Torres Strait Islanders themselves. Moore noted that Islanders were attempting to reconstruct their own culture in order to clarify and consolidate their identity as a people.⁴⁵ Another source of Islander traditional and contemporary art is the extensive catalogue of Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary artworks from the first major Torres Strait art exhibition, *Ilan Pasin (this is our way): Torres Strait Art* (1998) which also contained major artefacts from the Cambridge Collection.

So it can be said that items of material culture (sometimes gained exploitatively)⁴⁶ were taken away from Torres Strait to become part of the education system of imperialist European societies; and not shared with Islanders. This past restriction on access by Torres Strait Islanders to these records and artefacts⁴⁷ could also be seen as part of the

40. Haddon cited in Moore 1984: 12.

41. Sharp 1980: 16.

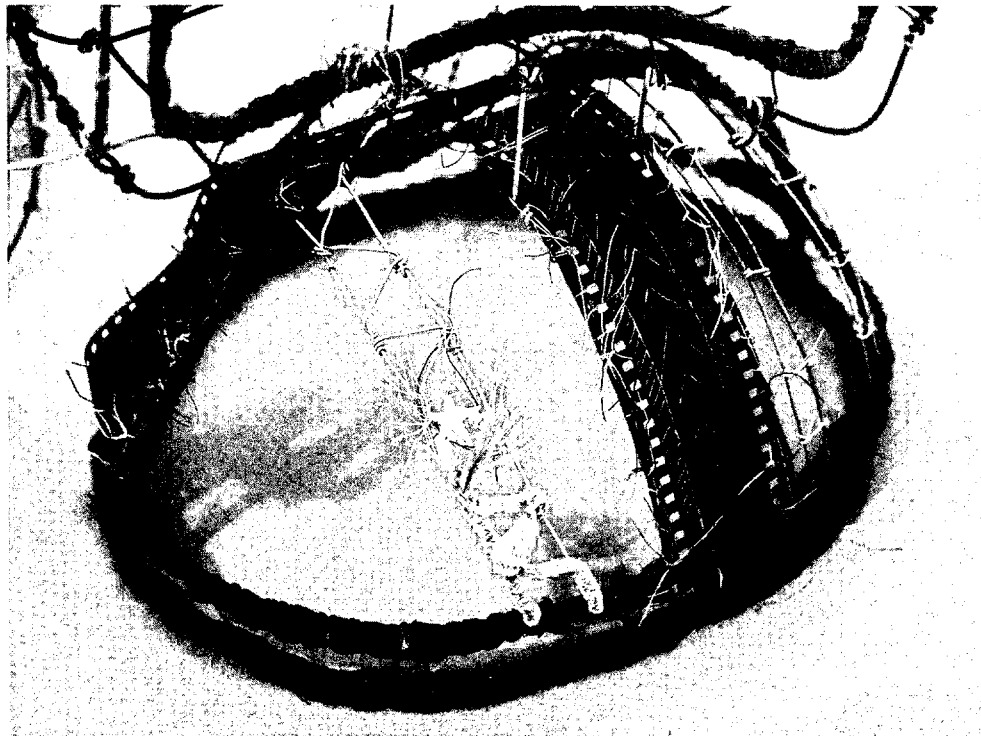
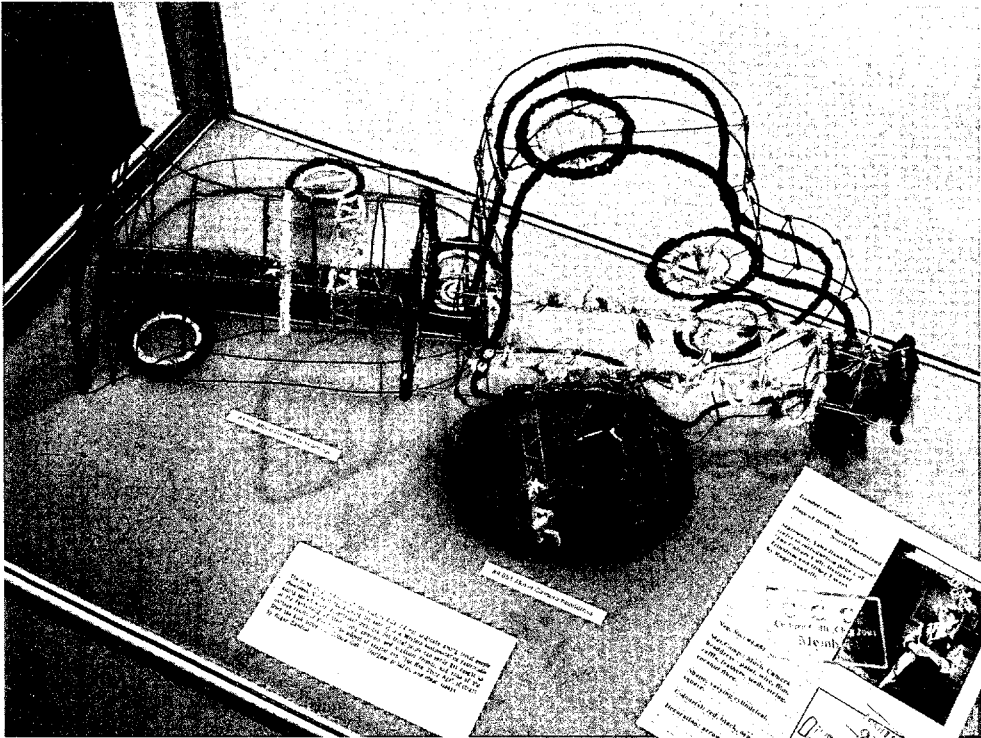
42. Stocking 1985: 238.

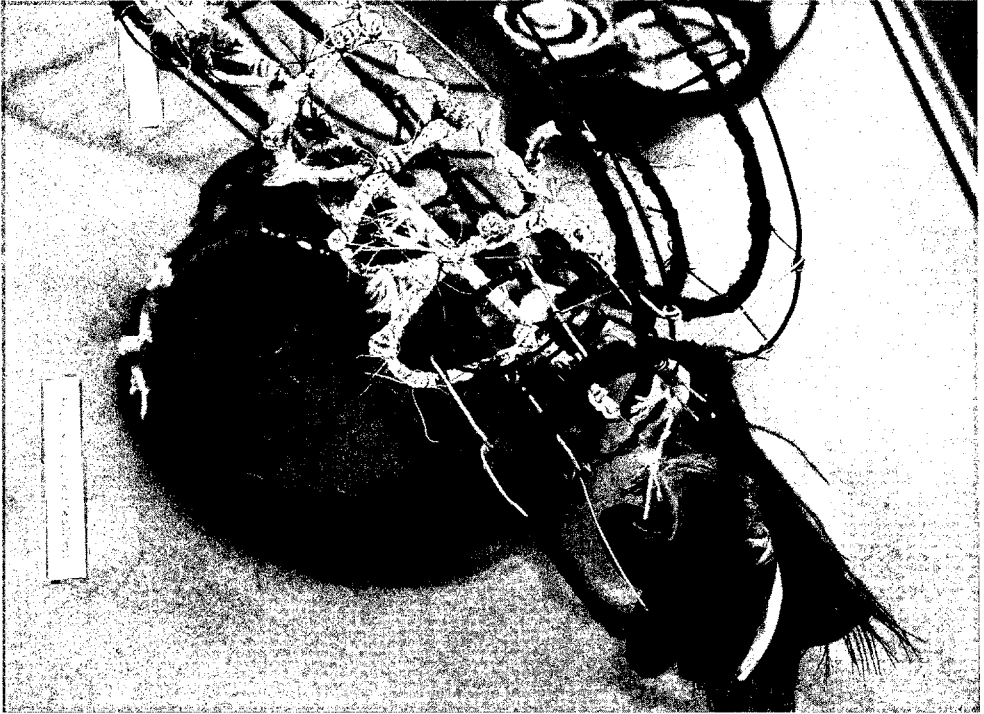
43. Herle and Philp 2000: 157.

44. Haddon 1901-1935.

45. Moore 1984: 7.

46. For an example of an incident involving a member of the anthropological team and the unwilling surrender of an artefact by a Torres Strait Islander, see Haddon 1901: 34.





Above and previous page. Fig 4 Movie Camera head-dress (installation component) in *Culture Cullt Clan 2001*: head-dress; film cartridge; dance rattle (dimensions vary), wire, string, paint, seagrass, raffia, shells, feathers, seeds, film, A4 document, engraved metal plaque 10 x 20cm. Janice Peacock 2002. In 'Six coats of Black' (Camp-fire group exhibition), Fire-works Gallery, Brisbane. Photo: Elton Cole, courtesy of the author.

project of 'creative destruction', or, more accurately, 'historical genocide', that brought a new and different kind of law and order to Islanders in order to further the West's own 'historical advance'. However, it is through records obtained from these major collections that contemporary Torres Strait Islanders have had access to traditional items and information today.⁴⁸ I myself drew upon the Haddon archival collections for inspiration in the production of my artworks, in particular those for *Culture Cullt Clan 2001*.

My great-grandfather, Thomas Randolph, who met Haddon in 1888,⁴⁹ was part of that colonial history. Their meeting demonstrates in a small way the diversity of relationships and encounters within 'historical colonialism' and illustrates how Torres Strait historical events are juxtaposed with our own personal histories. I am reminded of Auntie Flo Kennedy's words concerning the acceptance of cultural diversity and the importance of 'knowing who we are and where we come from'.

47. See Fuary 1998: 123; McGrath 1998: 104.

48. See Fuary 2000: 124.

49. See Haddon 1901: 176.

This inevitably raises the question of what would have happened if Haddon and his anthropological team had not extensively collected and documented those artefacts. Today's Torres Strait Islanders can be thankful that many artefacts were preserved, even more so since negotiations began for them to be returned to the Torres Strait.⁵⁰

Serious negotiations for the artefacts to be returned to Torres Strait and their owners have been held since 1998, the year of the exhibition, *Ilan Pasin (this is our way)*.⁵¹ A previous attempt to regain cultural items is recorded in the documentary film made by Frances Calvert in 1997, *Cracks in the Mask*. Ephraim Bani, a Mabuiag man from the western islands, travelled to Europe with his wife in the hope of bringing artefacts back to those families whose ancestors had made them, including their own. His efforts at the time were in vain but, with the opening of the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island in 2004, the return of items to Torres Strait Islanders is now within sight.⁵² The centre is the result of intense negotiation over recent years to establish a much-needed cultural centre in the Torres Strait and it is the first public keeping place for historical and cultural artefacts and art, both modern and traditional. It was hoped that the new centre could be an incentive for Cambridge University and other museums to restore items to Torres Strait Islander people.⁵³

In 2002, an exhibition entitled *Past Time: Torres Strait Islander Material from the Haddon Collection, 1888-1905* exhibited 60 artefacts at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra. This was the first time artefacts from the Haddon collections had been returned to Australia since their original collection. They later toured to Cairns Regional Gallery from June to September of the same year. Terry Waia, then chairman of the Torres Strait Regional Authority, clarified how extremely important these artefacts are to Torres Strait Islanders as they represent our ancestors, our identity, who we are and where we come from as a people (Waia n.d.). Torres Strait Islander artist, Victor McGrath,⁵⁴ refers to his respect for the nameless makers of 'the rare and beautiful Torres Strait treasures' he was privileged to be able to view and handle, which were taken away and housed in museums in Britain and the United States. Fuary similarly refers to Yam Islanders' feelings of not having had access to past photographs and objects and their responses when given the opportunity to do so.⁵⁵

I have further concerns about how the continued possession of artefact collections is weighted more towards satisfying a possessive Western 'self'.⁵⁶ According to Aboriginal artist, Ron Hurley, the purpose of museum ethnographic collecting was:

50. The Cape York Aboriginal collections of WC Roth, the Northern Protector of Aborigines at that time, are the only other Australian Indigenous collections, which can compare to Haddon's in scope and documentation. These two collections are amongst the most complete and fully documented amongst indigenous peoples in any part of the world (Moore 1984: 39).

51. Bani 1998: 127-130.

52. The expression *gab titui* 'journey of the stars' combines words from both eastern and western languages of the Torres Strait. The Cultural Centre was officially opened on 16 April 2004 (Armistead and Southey n.d.).

53. Bani 1998: 132.

54. McGrath 1998: 104.

55. Fuary 1998: 123.

56. Stocking 1985: 238.

to satisfy a morbid curiosity, and an insatiable hunger for things exotic (the noble savage syndrome). These vast public and private collections of plunder sat in musty museums, juxtaposed against white man's technology and cultural icons, in order to demonstrate the order of man, the superiority of the colonisers.⁵⁷

Further concerns lie with whether the Haddon Collection has been transformed to comply with Westerners' desire for 'meaning' and 'possession'. Both traditional and contemporary cultural artefacts and collections continue to be motivated by the same act of possession; by being selected, ordered, and classified in hierarchies — to become a 'good' collection, thereby betraying its origins in the reciprocal belief systems and cultural lore of the peoples the artefacts are extracted (or bought) from. Cultural objects continue to be viewed as 'personal treasures' and are portrayed as representative of our 'authenticated' cultural survival, made public according to Western art concepts. Consequently, I agree with Stocking that, when artefacts are placed in a modern museum or art gallery, a distorted 'meaning' is created by virtue of their isolation from their traditional context and this destroys their true social and cultural relations.⁵⁸

The colonial principle of 'order' is perpetuated in the activities of Western science, encoded and legitimised through imperialist practices. Hence, the systematic documentation of indigenous societies can be found as bones, mummies and skulls placed in museums for public viewing and 'consumption'; given monetary value and immortalised by art galleries and private collectors; as languages to linguists; as customs to anthropologists and ethnographers; and as spiritual beliefs and behaviours to psychologists. The 'fragmentation' of indigenous societies is not purely a modern-day phenomenon, but the consequence of imperialist rule and its dedication to appropriating indigenous societies' lifestyles to satisfy its own possessive 'self'.⁵⁹

Amongst these were original ethnographic 'performance' exhibitions, depicting 'primitive' people performing 'ritualistic' or 'animalistic' tasks, which spawned misrepresentations of cultural identity, thus ultimately denying the right of Indigenous people to be considered 'human'. The 'aborigines' put on displays that served to prove that European civilisation was superior; and scientific rationalisation justified paternalistic governance of indigenous peoples.⁶⁰ Lynette Russell gives numerous examples of captured Australian Aboriginal people, presupposed to be 'extremely primitive and savage', who were displayed in many American freak shows.⁶¹ Their audience was told they were 'distorted in human form', and their capture and containment considered a tribute to the skills of the sideshow organisers. This also recalls the indignities suffered by Australian Indigenous women and men who were removed and transformed into show-people as a part of the larger process of 'emptying the land'.⁶²

57. Hurley 2002. Ron Hurley's work as an artist explores the alienation of living as an urban Aboriginal 'between both cultures', and makes powerful statements about the politics of dispossession (Demozay 2001: 102).

58. Stocking 1985: 238-239.

59. Smith 2003: 27-28.

60. Fusco 1995: 41-43.

61. Russell 2001: 67.

62. Poignant 2004: 39.

Conclusion

Coco Fusco's sardonic commentary in her art performances such as *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit Buenos Aires*⁶³ references imperialist practices and the fragmentation of indigenous societies. It influences my work in its relation to contemporary cultural identity, and the use of 'intercultural performance' in the past as a form of public 'education' that contributed to the 'noble savage' syndrome.⁶⁴

We are all affected by our personal histories and the socio-political and historical context in which they are formed. In exchanging our histories, we may privilege any one of the senses. Representing history from a visual artist's point of view provides an effective way of exchanging histories. Privileging the visual, which is arguably the most influential and pervasive medium of communication today, provides a perspective that other media, including written texts, may lack. Through my artworks, such as the *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* series, I explore, express, comment on and seek audience response to my own diverse meanings regarding social identities and my own socio-cultural circumstances. *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* seeks an exchange of histories, which counter any neo-colonialist capacity to exclude Indigenous historical perspectives and commentary regarding 'primitivist' views. My story-telling preference has always been the visual: I use visual means to interpret my own personal and extended family history, which I offer to my audience to interpret or translate in their own terms.

Acknowledgements

This paper is based on a chapter of my exegesis for a Doctor of Visual Art (awarded April 2006), Queensland College of Art, Griffith University. I wish to acknowledge the help and support of my family in the creation of my artworks and also my exegesis supervisors, Pat HOFFIE and Anna Haebich. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Anna Shnukal for her advice and editing. Three components of *Culture Cullt Clan 2001* installation series were chosen as exhibits in the Kate Challis RAKA National Indigenous Art Award, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne in 2003. The *Gone Fishing* component was a finalist in the Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award of the same year.

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⁶³. Fusco 1998: 366.

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Canvassing identities: reflecting on the acrylic art movement in an Australian Aboriginal settlement

Françoise Dussart

Introduction

In this paper I analyse two decades of Warlpiri acrylic art production in the Central Desert settlement of Yuendumu. The study of acrylic art practices reveal how painting canvases with Dreaming stories has played a crucial role in the construction of Warlpiri identities since the early 1980s. Scrutinising painters' motivations to paint Dreaming stories for sale reveals how the production of acrylics provided a site where identity politics are negotiated among generations, between genders, and among painters, art-coordinators and the Australian society at large. The act of painting has in fact provided an arena in which ever-changing and often contrary motivations and priorities have found expression between 1984 and 2004. Tracking the significance of practice, I argue, brings us closer to an understanding of the changing nature of social identity.

Aboriginal acrylic at Yuendumu: a brief background

In the early 1980s, Australian governmental policies of self-determination encouraged Northern Territory Aboriginal people to engage in various non-Indigenous art initiatives intended to counteract the erosion of Indigenous cultural identity. Of the various programs deployed to mitigate the negative effects of colonisation and forced sedentarisation, the production of acrylic art – vibrantly painted canvases manifesting public representations of Aboriginal cosmology – proved the most resilient. Indeed, within five years of the program's start-up in 1983, Central Desert Aboriginal acrylic art – 'dot painting' as it came to be known – captured the attention of critics, collectors and scholars worldwide. As other anthropologists have noted, indigenous art that makes use of Western materials cannot be understood without careful analysis of its complex post-colonial entanglements.¹ Often overlooked, however, are the equally complex local negotiations among painters and their kin (as well as non-Indigenous 'advisors') – discourses and actions, which precede, accompany, and linger long after the actual production of the art. The obvious value of such analysis is rendered all the more significant when the Indigenous negotiation of art production is tracked over

1. See Dussart 2000, 2006; Johnson 2004; Myers 2002; Turner 1992.

time. Indeed, by drawing on interviews undertaken between 1984 and 2004 among Warlpiri people from the settlement of Yuendumu, it is not only possible to trace the social significance of non-Indigenous media on a settlement at large, but to explore the changing nature of social identity. As we shall see, in discussing the creation of canvases, Warlpiri painters and their kin have emphasized and contested cultural, generational and gendered attributes while producing different paths to Warlpiriness; locally constituted and globally framed by colonial and post-colonial policies. As I hope to show, the shifting values and expectations associated with the creation of acrylics in Yuendumu — where I have worked for the last quarter century — mirror broader transformations in the life of the settlement.

1984–1986: The rise of the acrylic gerontocracy

The history of acrylic production at Yuendumu has been well documented elsewhere,² but the basic chronology is as follows: in a moment that valued multifaceted efforts to nurture Aboriginal self-reliance (after more than three decades of 'sedentarised' oppression) non-Indigenous residents of the settlement made countless efforts to render the Warlpiri people and other Aborigines more self-sufficient. Economic imperatives aside, there was also an ideological incentive, a joint effort by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents of Yuendumu to encourage a sense of Aboriginal cultural pride and self-reliance. So in late 1983, 30 of the most senior women of the settlement decided to pool their ritual knowledge to produce enough painted objects to purchase a used Toyota Land Cruiser.³ The Toyota was needed to facilitate travelling to distant sacred sites, pursue hunting and gathering as well as ceremonial activities. These women first sold their paintings to a few friends, curators and tourists. Within a couple of months, the remunerative value of these visual representations of the Dreaming (*Jukurrpa*) became clear. What started out as a fundraising venture quickly attracted the attention of art professionals. More ambitious canvases were subsequently commissioned and the Aboriginal women quickly gained a broader and more discriminating audience along with the vehicle they needed.

The first group of women painters — all of whom were ritually active senior 'owners' (*kirda*) and 'managers' (*kurdungurlu*) of the Dreaming — oversaw the public representation of their countries (*ngurra*) that paralleled the procedures attending ceremonially constituted representations of Warlpiri cosmology. By that I mean, that although these women (and men) generally used brushes instead of fingers, the procedure necessitated the same forms of surveillance as, say, a ritual body- or sand-painting. This meant that during the process of creation, the senior painters tended to recount Dreaming stories associated with ceremonial performances. Thus, painting became a conduit for the informal transmission of ritual information — with some caveats.

² See Dussart 1988; Anderson and Dussart 1988.

³ Since sedentarisation in the late 1940s, Yuendumu inhabitants have produced objects that they sold or exchanged for other goods with missionaries, school teachers, shop keepers, and other government officials. However, the scale of production of acrylic paintings on canvas was much larger and more reliably sustained than any previous attempt.

Senior painters vigilantly withheld designs restricted to the initiates. This meant that paintings often had to be modified to minimise the risks associated with unauthorised revelation of non-public knowledge. A circle might become a semi-circle; a line might replace a U-shape. Stories associated with the sanctioned designs also received constant scrutiny. In fact, the process of producing those early acrylics mirrored the ceremonial surveillance associated with ritual life. Despite the novel medium of expression, the execution of all designs had to be overseen by *yawulyu-wardingki* or *muturnapatu* – initiated ritually active senior women and their male counterparts (*juju-wardingki*). The painters with whom I spoke all made clear the gerontocratic structure of the canvas production: only senior owners of Dreamings had the right to direct the painting of their stories, and even then all works produced had to receive the senior managers' approval.

In March 1984, the settlement's senior men got into the act. I can pinpoint the date exactly, because I was implicated in that first exchange. A dozen ritually-active senior men, impressed by the economic potential of acrylic sales, approached me and asked for help procuring supplies necessary to produce acrylic paintings of their respective versions of Dreaming. Aware of the contentious atmosphere that surrounded the production of acrylic paintings – a tug-of-war between the genders over how to represent public versions of the Dreaming – I declined the men's request and directed them to one of my male counterparts and the settlement's Adult Educator.

By mid-1985, the senior men and women painters of the settlement had managed to secure the funds needed to keep them in paints and canvases. That same year Darwin and Sydney hosted large exhibitions that featured the paintings of the senior painters. And while the Toyota soon broke down, the paintings travelled the world. I was present at Yuendumu during these early years of the so-called Acrylic Movement – a period marked by constant and often contentious negotiations between genders and among the settlement's half dozen residential groups – and observed how the production of art redefined and, at times, strengthened the ritual life of Yuendumu. For it quickly became clear to me that the acrylic canvases, far from being the solitary action of an isolated painter, were in fact highly collaborative gestures predicated on the ritual rights and obligations of the painters and their close or classificatory kin associated with the Dreaming-stories and countries represented. The dot paintings might have displayed a single signature, in large measure to satisfy Western notions of creation – a presumption that gives new meaning to 'Dotting the I'! – but each work was inevitably the product of more than one hand. Bound by kinship, the painters acted out their social and ritual relationships during the planning, production, sale and promotion of their paintings.

At the end of 1985 the art production was institutionalised through a governmental grant that allowed Yuendumu to employ a non-Indigenous art-coordinator (known then as an art-advisor) to handle the logistical demands of production and market. A few months later, in early 1986, the senior painters of Yuendumu formed a cooperative which they named *Warlukurlangu*, after a Warlpiri estate owned by a residential kin group that then dominated much of the ritual and aesthetic life of the settlement.

The non-Indigenous staff of *Warlukurlangu* saw their obligations as two-fold: (1) to make the sales operation financially viable and (2) to promote 'cultural maintenance'.⁴ The Warlpiri had a lengthier list of expectations. They felt art-coordinators should

supply canvases and paints, sell paintings, act as bankers, take painters and kin on hunting and gathering expeditions, facilitate transportation of logistical activities surrounding ceremonial events, gather ochres for painting and rituals, help with the daily collection of fire wood, drive painters and kin to Alice Springs and outstations to visit relatives. In exchange, the painters agreed to paint what mattered to them the most, the Dreaming. For the painters, the art-coordinators were to serve as *de facto* stand-in for non-Indigenous audiences and more broadly the state. They were supposed 'to look after', 'to care' [*jinamardarni*] for painters and their relatives. As one painter explained early on in 1986:

I care for my Dreaming. I care that White people see my Dreaming painted [on a canvas], so they can't take that Dreaming's country away. If they see the [painted] Dreaming, they see its potency, then they understand [that it is vital].⁵

In the second decade painters were forced to accept that the burdens they had hoped to place on the art-advisor had been rebuffed — a combination of duties that would have turned the advisor into the agent of things social and cosmological. The painters were forced to accept that the market for their iconographic richness rarely extended beyond the surface of their painted practices. Perhaps the unfulfilled expectations of the painters and their kin can offer at least partial explanation for the dramatic change in the politics of production. By the end of the second decade of the Acrylic Movement, painting practices were significantly less collaborative than in the first and as we shall see painters are now expecting far less from art-coordinators and the organisation as a whole.

Between 1984 and 1986 certain production protocols took shape: senior men tended to paint with other senior men, and senior women painted with other senior women. The gender-specific *separation* that characterised the early months of acrylic painting evolved first into a less adamant dynamic of *avoidance* — whereby groups of senior men and groups of senior women would paint in and around the same building, but in discrete locations. These gender-specific collaborations generally adapted the practices undertaken during ceremonial activities; to wit, the Dreaming-stories represented on canvas were produced and monitored by the same individuals responsible for those narratives during ritual activity. By that I mean that even though the painters never perceived acrylic paintings as formal extensions of actual ritual activity, the politics of production replicated the proprietary and managerial configurations present during the ceremonially generated designs. In other words, the intercultural product expanded to include the negotiation of ritual material among initiated participants in a non-ritual context. Indeed, the early years of acrylic paintings were times for senior ritually-active men and women to reconstitute eroded relationships to one another vis-à-vis the production of ritual knowledge painted for sale. The monitoring and working, through the production of public versions of Dreaming-stories that could be seen by all, fostered a meta-ritual context for production.⁶

4. See Wright 2000 for further insight in understanding the complex roles art-coordinators are asked to perform in art centers all over Australia, and how they cope with and resist demands issued by two main constituencies, often working at cross-purposes: Aboriginal artists and state funding agencies.

5. Personal communication 1986.

In devising ways to create appropriate paintings for sale, the Warlpiri senior painters strengthened social and economic connections among themselves and among genders. At this juncture, the acrylic practice embodied alteration in the ways control over the creation of public knowledge was engendered. The paintbrush came to be wielded by senior Warlpiri people of both genders in ways that further complicated our understanding of their ritual world. As such, the production of acrylics embodied, in its first phase, a revived legitimacy of both male and female seniority in matters of ritual and meta-ritual activity. It is important to emphasise here that those senior painters involved were born before sedentarisation at Yuendumu in 1948. Over three decades, the then senior Warlpiri painters had seen their social roles eroded, their land taken away, their freedom to travel and re-enact the essence of their existence — *the Dreaming* — discouraged. Thus, in a settlement environment where some of the traditional gendered gerontologically-constituted economic and political positions had been weakened, the phenomenon of acrylic production invigorated an engendered knowledge system that traditionally privileged seniority.⁷ Senior female and male painters reclaimed a small measure of their pre-sedentarised constituted social status by creating or monitoring the reproduction of modified ritual designs in the newfound medium.

Such connectedness eventually extended beyond the settlement once the painters began to receive requests to travel to major cities around the world on behalf of 'their culture'. Enjoying a measure of prestige beyond the confines of ceremonial events sent a clear message to their kin at Yuendumu: the painters, because of their seniority, possessed the potency and power to redeploy unrestricted Dreaming-stories, albeit publicly rendered, to a broader audience.

1987–1993: Exchanges between generations

In July of 1987, Yuendumu received major commissions that necessitated female and male members from Yuendumu's most prominent residential groups to come together — as they often did during ritual performances — and paint gender-specific canvases. The external impact of that undertaking has been analysed elsewhere.⁸ Here I would like to limit my observations to motives articulated by painters. Although non-Indigenous recognition had its place in the decision to accept the major cross-gender commission, equally important was the desire on the part of the senior painters to entice younger kin to commit to the socially and spiritually demanding 'business' of representing the Dreaming. The senior painters of both genders hoped that the commission would intensify a younger generation's commitment to those cosmological obligations that were part and parcel of the replication of the Dreaming. Some scholars have observed how acrylic painting or video have been deployed to 'preserve' culture,⁹ others such as Terry Turner,¹⁰ Faye Ginsburg and Fred Myers (this volume) and Melinda Hinkson¹¹ have argued that through the circulation of media (including acryl-

6. Dussart 1999.

7. See also Myers 1986, 1994.

8. See Dussart 1999, 2000.

9. See for example Michaels 1987.

10. Turner 1990, 1992.

11. Hinkson 2004.

ics), Aboriginal people reconstitute themselves and their future. This is exactly what senior painters had in mind when coaxing younger kin to help with the commissioned works. Clearly, acrylic painting was becoming a site of negotiations for the reestablishment of socialities between the young and the old. Senior painters, drawing on their repertoires of negotiations and valuations, hoped to readjust through acrylic paintings the obligations of younger kin towards the Dreaming and the land as well as intergenerational ritual obligations. By no means unique to Yuendumu, older members' concerns with the erosion of traditional cosmological obligations and ideas about young people's social spaces were met with resistance by their younger relatives who did not want to embrace notions of 'preservation' and who, in the first decade, reconstructed themselves away from the painting of acrylics themselves, as we shall see below.¹²

I was present in the settlement when the Warlpiri received news of the lucrative and prestigious commission from the South Australian Museum in Adelaide. Under time pressure to execute the paintings, senior painters decided to broaden the circle of painters to include younger members of their respective residential groups. Despite the mounting pressure on these younger members, few non-senior residents of the settlement answered the call. The young would-be recruits, generally between 10 and 25 years of age, found little attraction in the overtly tedious task of 'dotting' (filling in) the interiors of the canvas. Furthermore, they resisted all arguments that focused on the spiritual benefits that would accrue to those helping to produce ritual designs. Any hopes held by senior painters to strengthen or reconfigure their relations with younger kin fell on deaf ears generally. The situation was not helped by external expectations that accompanied the commission; art critics and curators were quick to note that acrylics could only be properly performed by senior kin with 'authentic traditional knowledge'. Painting practices became essentialised as 'old people's' activities within and beyond the settlement.

At the outset the settlement's senior painters saw the commission, and acrylic painting generally, as a means of addressing a number of cosmological concerns. To counteract the lack of interest in ritual matters by young Warlpiri people, they hoped to include younger residential kin in the major assignments as a means of creating a non-threatening milieu in which ritual knowledge could be transmitted inter-generationally. Concomitantly, the senior painters focused on safeguarding propriety while deepening the ritual knowledge of their kin, actions they hoped would serve as a prelude to the nurturance of the *Jukurrpa* in more restricted, non-public domains. The commission offered the promise of allaying a growing fear among the settlement's senior members that ritual life was 'not as strong as it used to be'. But was this hybridised publicly produced medium ideally suited for such pedagogic and ceremonial motives? It turned out that it was not. The young kin rebuffed the entreaties of their senior kin, whose proposals and expectations were perceived as overbearing (bossy) and ignorant of young people's interests and lives.

¹² See similar issues raised in the late 1970s by famous Yolngu painter Narritjin, discussed in Morphy, Deveson and Hayne 2005.

But what exactly was at stake during these negotiations between younger and senior Warlpiri with regards to the canvases? What was being brokered? How did the inter-generational resistance express itself? Perhaps two brief passages taken from my field notes of the period will clarify the tensions.

The first exchange took place in summer of 1987. I spoke at length with the teenage sister of a prominent senior female painter who was pressuring the young woman, whom I will call Kate, to help with the big commissions.¹³

FD: Do you know what your big sister is painting?

Kate: Yes that's my country, that's my Dreaming.

FD: Do you know the story?

Kate: Yes. But I cannot really tell it to you. She knows it, she [my senior sister] can tell it to you.

FD: Have you seen many painted versions of your Dreaming?

Kate: Yes I have seen lots of canvases, all the same you know.

FD: Can you paint it?

Kate: My sister can show me. She is a strong and active ritual performer.

FD: Do you want me to give you a small canvas and paints?

Kate: I can't paint. I need her permission you know. This stuff belongs to senior people, you know, I am a bit scared The Dreaming is really powerful. My sister — she knows the Dreaming, she is powerful, she can sing it. You know I am scared of all these old people getting together and painting. I sit here because I have close relatives here. They work with lots of powerful things from the *Jukur-rpa*. You know it's like those *yawulyu* [women's ceremonies], I do not go unless she takes me there. That's all old people's stuff, *juju* [powerful restricted ritual and knowledge]. I don't like old people stuff.

As the exchange above shows, the *knowledge*¹⁴ of the Dreaming was not in play; rather, it was the *representation* of that knowledge, as well as the status that accrued with it, that caused Kate to resist the petitions of her elder kin. For with the rights to make manifest the Dreaming, came power, and with power, came responsibility. Kate demurred, preferring to avoid the dangers and burdens that accompanied the visual representation of a Dreaming. Indeed, she declined to enter the ritual world more generally since she perceived that world to be one rife with obligations. She did not want to have the responsibilities to control the iconographic representations of her Dreaming-stories. Manifesting an adolescent ennui and rebellion, common in many societies, she resisted 'old people's stuff'.

And how did the 'old people' react to Kate's rejection? I spoke with a number of senior painters to find out. Their reactions illuminated various aspirations and dissatis-

¹³. Kate requested anonymity if I were to publish this exchange.

¹⁴. A person is said to 'know the Dreaming' when he or she can reenact itineraries of ancestral beings and travel to the sites. In other words, a knowledgeable person can sing, dance and paint specific Dreaming-stories for which she or he is responsible through kinship and residential affiliations.

factions among the ritual leaders of Yuendumu. Three comments represent the general sentiments of those senior residents:

Painter A: When we are all dead, [Kate] will remember. She'll remember we taught her.

Painter B: She sleeps around too much, even with men who are not fully initiated, she'll learn nothing. She thinks differently than us senior ritual women [*yawulyu-wardingki*]. She does not help me with my paintings [as she should if she were a good kin], she does not sit and listen to ritual songs. She wonders around the settlement or goes off into town. She's got different ideas. Maybe she is scared.

Painter C: We do not know how young people think. They have different ways to think. Maybe they'll learn. Maybe not.

In the end, despite their heartfelt desire (and the assistance of art-coordinators) the senior painters had only limited success in involving their younger kin in the production of acrylics. The painting itself was hard enough to execute, but when coupled with the demands of learning the ritual narratives and obligations associated with the designs, the challenge proved overwhelming. Ultimately, the senior painters painted the canvases (and many subsequent works) on behalf of younger kin, who at times sold the works under their names. While this transaction satisfied various perceived obligations the senior painters felt vis-à-vis their younger relatives, it misrepresented the true nature of the painter's output. It effectively inverted the 'school of' notion common to, say, Italian Renaissance art, by broadening attribution to younger kin when it was in fact only the senior painter who had a hand in painting the work.

The tug-of-war that characterised the early negotiations between genders eventually spilled over into inter-generational tussles. Consider, for example, this emblematic exchange between a senior painter and her fifteen-year-old granddaughter:

Senior Painter: Look granddaughter, this is your father's country, this is your place. You are *kirda* [owner] for it. You can paint that Dreaming. This is what you have to do. [She hands a sketch of a Dreaming design to her kin.]

Granddaughter: I am too busy, I do not know how to do that. You do it for me. You look after me.

Three days later the granddaughter sold a painting under her own name to the art-coordinator even though the work had been painted by the grandmother. Whether or not the art-coordinator was aware of the true source, she praised the granddaughter and provided an advance of the painting's actual sale. When I asked the putative painter about the transaction, she beamed and said, 'My grandmother is a good kin. She always looks after me properly. She cares for me.' This explanation is used to emphasize the importance to fulfil kinship obligations redefined in a world under assault. In other words, the senior painter had amply satisfied her kinship obligations, as grandparents are *de rigueur* more lenient, by providing the teenager granddaughter with a painted canvas for sale.

The response is telling on a number of levels. It speaks to the complicated nature of attribution and its relationship to kin obligation. It also highlights that absence of the kind of master/student relationship documented among Yolngu painters from Arnhem Land.¹⁵ And whereas it might be tempting to conjecture that the Yolngu tradition of

producing art — mainly in the form of bark paintings — is the result of a longer period of inter-cultural engagement, the circumstances in Yuendumu suggested a diminishing, rather than strengthening, of the intergenerational ties through the production of art. Matters were not helped by the external political changes that inevitably affected the economic circumstances of settlement life, the production and promotion of acrylic paintings and painters.

Shifting values: painting acrylics between 1994 and 2004

By the early 1990s governmental social programs that previously encouraged self-determination were replaced by the harsher policies of conservative parliamentarians in control of Australia's welfare policies. Their heavy-handed economic mandates of Aboriginal self-sufficiency trickled down to art-coordinators who were under increasing pressure to make the painter's cooperative financial viable. This only compounded the growing alienation among some of the ritually active painters, who ultimately chose to redirect their social capital away from the production of acrylic painting. The frustration of these erstwhile painters is best captured by Dolly Nampijinpa, Aboriginal chairwoman of *Warlukurlangu* until her death in 2004, who responded as follows when I asked, in July 1997, if she missed producing acrylics when she wanted to:

Painting is stressful. They [art-coordinators] sell our paintings sometimes, but for too little, now. Not like before, at the beginning. They probably steal from us. Maybe we [you and me] should not have started. Also there's too much stress with kin, too many demands are made on us the painters by White people, too many demands from our relatives for money we do not get. One day [the art-coordinator] wants me to paint, one day she says nothing. I am tired with the whole lot of them. And my grandchildren, they all want to paint canvases for *Warlukurlangu*, but they are ignorant, so I have to help them so they can get some money from *Warlukurlangu*. I have to look after my grandchildren. That's all we get from them [art coordinators] — money! They do not take me anywhere when I need to, they do not look after me properly, but they should because I am the chairwoman. Sometimes, they lend me money, but they do not look after me. That's not right. Only old people knowledgeable in the ritual ways should be given canvases. Young people can paint only if we make sure what they do is proper. The young ones, we can help them if we decide to help. They [art-coordinators] ask any young people to paint, but that's not right. They're [young painters] rubbish, they know nothing. They learn nothing like that, they get a sketch from a relative, paint it quick, that's it. They learn nothing. Nothing.

Another senior painter who abandoned acrylic, broadened the indictment:

I am sick of painting canvas. For whom? White people? I do not care for White people. They do not care for me. I have another job now, I work for kids who sniff petrol. I do not need Whites to know about the Dreaming. *Warlukurlangu* people [art-coordinators] they only like some painters. They do not help everyone at Yuendumu, only some painters. But the Dreaming-stories they belong to all, not just the painters, we can all paint them. Art-coordinators should help everyone. They did not help me to go to my relatives' funerals. I was really upset with them. They did not help me really with anything, I helped them, I painted canvases for

15. See Morphy 1991; Taylor 1996.

exhibitions when they asked me to. I am not anymore. I want to care for the sniffing-petrol mob, not White people.

More mildly, almost wistfully, a third senior painter recently observed:

I paint [with my spouse] now, in my camp. Not like at the beginning. I can hear the Dreaming, I can follow it by myself. We all paint by ourselves now. No one is boss. I am boss for myself.

The responses of these painters — manifesting various degrees of alienation and nostalgia — both vis-à-vis art-coordinators and kin resistant to satisfying inter-generational obligation — is of course not unique to Yuendumu.¹⁶ In the end, the painters quoted above redirected much of their energies away from painting and back to ritual, as a means of maintaining the *Jukurrpa* and the social cohesion of their residential groups.

Some senior painters made a less radical break from the acrylic movement. In fact, there are still a handful of senior painters who attempt to maintain the original spirit of the art movement — perceiving their work as the intercultural manifestation of a powerful Indigenous cosmology. But they are an exception. In the last decade most Warlpiri painters have taken a more pragmatic (or at least less spiritual) view of the enterprise — abandoning both the collaborative kin-based oversight that characterised the early years of production, as well as the rhetorical discourse that invoked the promise of intercultural appreciation. More and more of the painters are producing works divorced from the social networks that had once sanctioned the designs. There are a far greater number of individual painters at work — an independence entirely divorced from the structure of collaboration that informed the earlier years of practice. That said, it would be simplistic to conclude that the emergence of the individual marks the death-knell of the social networks defining Yuendumu Warlpiriness. Rather, the current diversity of motives and methods behind the making of public art in Yuendumu manifests and contributes to the intensely heterogenous nature of post-colonial Aboriginal settlement life today.

By the mid-1990s, three main groups of painters constituted the sources for acrylic art in the settlement. The first group included original painters — mostly senior ritual business men and women from Yuendumu's three most prominent residential groups — who continued to produce art as they had in the past, but with little or no expectation for positive social dividends. These painters increasingly limited their production oversight often only to their spouses or close senior siblings.

The second group was made up of originally active painters, but these painters were more vocally disappointed by the social failures in evidence at the end of the first decade of production. As such, they advocated a more dynamic approach to problems such as drug addiction, low literacy, and exodus of young people to more urban centres — an approach that included art initiatives targeted at young at-risk relatives.

The third and final contingent of new painters was drawn from less prominent, ritually-marginal residential groups — individuals often recruited by various non-

16. See for example Merlan 1998; Austin-Brooks 2003.

Indigenous art-coordinators seeking ways to expand and find 'new blood' for a difficult market, unconcerned with ritual configurations.

It would be misguided to suggest that any of these three groups of painters sustain the level of intensity that was present in the first decade of the movement. Most of the original painters have either passed away or have dramatically scaled back their inter-cultural representations of the Dreaming that use the medium of acrylic. The motives behind this decision are multiple: a desire to focus on the strengthening and revitalisation of settlement and pan-Aboriginal ritual life; a resistance to the stresses that come with the production of art, and the funds generated by it; and a need to respond to more pressing issues of younger at-risk kin.

Connecting the dots: final reflections on Aboriginal acrylic art

In the first decade of the so-called Acrylic Movement, painters at Yuendumu created acrylic artwork that mirrored the patterns of ritual obligation in evidence during more traditional manifestations of ceremonial activity. To paint the Dreaming was to reenact and reinvigorate its ritual potency and, by extension, a means of tightening the social networks of the settlement. The burdens of ownership and managerial oversight – the *kirda/kurdungurlu* relationship central to the maintenance of ritual obligation – strengthened through the gender-specific collaborations of senior ritual leaders willing to paint public versions of their Dreamings. As such, the first decade of acrylic art movement (1984–1994) was marked by a renewal of correlative kinship authority. Senior men and women actively involved in the ritual life at Yuendumu looked to the production of acrylics as a way of strengthening the learning of what should matter to Warlpiri people – their connections to the Dreaming, the land and their kin – and the senior painters' places in sustaining more traditional ways and beliefs. Additionally, the settlement generally felt a rare sense of external affirmation thanks to the international attention the canvases stimulated. Travel to venues beyond the settlement, to events that celebrated the rich and seemingly robust iconography of the Central Desert cultures provided a fleeting sense of importance, though a consequential social sense of stress accompanied the non-Indigenous acclaim. In short, the acrylic canvases, as negotiated acts of translation, reconfigured both intra- and inter-cultural social relations; both painters and audience were transformed by the exchange.

But by 1994, the tenor of acrylic art production had changed. Increasingly, the Warlpiri resisted the intercultural potential of the medium, despite the encouragements of the non-Indigenous art-coordinators. The second decade of the movement was marked by less productive tensions – conflicts of an intergenerational nature. It soon became clear that there was a growing divide between the senior painters who had spearheaded the movement, and younger kin resistant to the prospect of satisfying the ceremonial obligations that came with the production of the art. The presence of the art-coordinators did not help matters. Non-Indigenous intermediaries dealt with external pressures that compelled them first to 'preserve' culture, and later to make it more economically viable through a more intensely commercialised sale of acrylics. They could only turn a blind eye to the social networks that had previously determined the manner in which the visual iconography of the Warlpiri would find public expression.

In absolute economic terms, the acrylic movement is now perhaps more robust than ever, but this increase in commercial success has come at a price. The cross-gendered and gerontologically-constituted oversight is no longer guiding its production.

Much has been written about the function of intercultural visual media within the Indigenous social sphere. Some might argue that these media serve as overt expressions of a traditional culture translated into a post-modern medium. This 'preservationist' perspective is countered by the theories of other social scientists who perceived in the translated visual acts of indigenous cultures an attempt — generally positive in its results — to reconstitute indigeness in ways that bolster the social and political strength of a community under assault. But when it comes to the Aboriginal acrylics produced in the Central Australian Desert, a third hypothesis must be entertained. By taking the measure of change in the production of canvases over 20 years, it is necessary to acknowledge the dynamic transformations of the very nature of the exchange and production of artwork. And in this metamorphosing negotiation it is possible to identify the broader more profound negotiations of identity that have informed and shaped the social and economic identities of the painters and their relatives. In other words, although the subject matter of the canvases painted since 1984 has changed little, the social structures of the canvas-makers have been anything but static. Yet it would be wrong to suggest that the acrylic painting is a mere reflection of the erosion of the social structures associated with the traditional ceremonial life of the settlement. The act of painting has in fact provided an arena in which ever-changing and often contrary motivations and priorities can find expression. Painters of acrylics at Yuendumu are shaping new values associated with the production of Aboriginalities less tethered to traditional notions of ritual prestige, to residential group membership, and to expectation from the Australian society at large. Yuendumu in the early twenty-first century is a settlement buffeted by the competing pressures of post-industrial non-Aboriginal market forces and the resilient residues of an egalitarian ethos that once found vibrant expression in ceremonial activity.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank all the Yuendumu painters and their kin for sharing their stories and helping me understand what acrylic canvases meant to them. I owe a special debt to Molly Nampijinpa, Rosie Nangala, Dolly Nampijinpa, Judy Nampijinpa, Jack Jampijinpa, Paddy Japalajarri and Paddy Jupurrurla for their support. I also want to thank Nancy Munn and two anonymous readers for their comments on earlier drafts.

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A modern day Corroboree: towards a history of the New South Wales Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout

Heidi Norman

Introduction

This paper presents a history of the Annual New South Wales Aboriginal Rugby League 'Knockout' Carnival, an annual football competition involving teams from all over the state. This significant event has been running for 36 years. For the New South Wales Aboriginal community, the Knockout is the biggest event of the year attracting up to 60 teams and many thousands of Aboriginal spectators. It is run by and for the Aboriginal community and is largely funded from private sponsorship and community support. For the most part this major sporting and cultural event goes unnoticed by the wider community, although the media coverage, particularly prevalent in regional centres reports the presence of Aboriginal people as an 'influx' and expresses fears over possible violence and disorder.

Much academic work in the field of Aboriginal history over the last 25 years has documented Indigenous peoples' resistance and political demands, such as Heather Goodall's ethnographic study of land in Aboriginal politics and Gillian Cowlishaw's studies of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal race relations.¹ Other works have sought to 'correct' earlier accounts of Australian history, such as the work of Reynolds.² More recently Maria Nugent's study, *Botany Bay*,³ suggests a meeting of history and the place of remembering in historical renderings—a kind of multi-layered separate, but intersecting dialogue.

While these studies have been undertaken by non-Indigenous scholars, in various ways genuinely connected to the community and people who inform their study, the focus is inevitably about Aboriginal people 'on the margins'. We might see this in the studies of resistance to white domination and dispossession, in accounts of race relations or in the criss-crossing of experience and the different interpretations and meanings of events. By way of contrast, the challenge of my research is in part related to the nature of the event. The Knockout is an all-Aboriginal run, initiated and funded

1. Goodall 1996; Cowlishaw 2004, 2006.

2. Reynolds 1972, 1989, 1995.

3. Nugent 2005.

event. Every aspect of this event speaks to Indigenous realities. In documenting this event perhaps a new account of Aboriginal history might be discerned in the context of self-determination, or at least a period 'more free' of the oppressive role of the Aborigines Welfare Board. The field of Aboriginal history necessarily hovers around black and white relations, while the focus of the study of this all-Aboriginal celebratory event is only briefly concerned with non-Aboriginal relations. But this is not to falsely elevate Indigeneity as a rarefied, separate reality, but rather to understand how this event emerged from particular experiences that are both culturally continuous in a traditional sense and historically produced.

The other related challenge that emerges is that this event has no precedent: in a scholarly sense as there are no previous studies, and in the sense that as a community event there have been no records or archives, aside from photos and media coverage of the Knockout. Therefore much of this study is based on primary research.

This article's main aim is to document an important and little known Aboriginal event that is significant for far more than its purely sporting connotations. The New South Wales Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout has been run independently since 1971 drawing on a range of private, government and community sponsorship. One aim of this essay is to make the simple point that a large number of Aboriginal people have been able to organise a hugely popular and complex event attended by many thousands of people over 36 years.

Besides providing a descriptive history of the Knockout, I want to show it as a different articulation of what might be thought of as political activism; how kinship and family relations are central to how we organise and how cultural practice and historical association interact in a dynamic process. The Knockout flowered from the complex interaction of economic change and its social impact, government policy and Aboriginal aspirations. This study, the first of its kind on the Knockout, seeks to locate this significant Aboriginal event in this historical context.

The football carnival can be understood as a modern and adapted medium for cultural performance and expression, for kinship-based modes of organisation merged with state shaped communities, and for courtship and competition. The football is reminiscent of a four-day traditional ceremonial dance and celebration, but also enables new social and cultural practices to emerge. It is an opportunity for families to gather, reunite as a community and barrack for their home-town and mob, and commemorate past glories and those who have passed on. The Knockout is fiercely contested; world class, tough football is on display.

The Knockout, beginning in Sydney in 1971, is widely described as a 'modern day Corroboree' and attracts teams from all over New South Wales from as far as Bourke, Moree, Dubbo, Ballina and Bega to the south. The event involves incredible organisation and planning, largely on a voluntary basis. Victory is cited as a lifetime highlight for players and communities.

The history of the Knockout

The Knockout emerged from the new and growing Sydney inner-city Aboriginal community in the late 1960s and early 1970s and can also be understood as part of a much



Moree
Boomerangs
1930s. Photo
reproduced
from a paper
copy held by
the Moree
Regional
Library

longer tradition of participation by Aboriginal people in the football code of Rugby League.

The changing relations between the state and Aboriginal people in New South Wales, such as the winding up of the Welfare Board and appointment of an Aboriginal advisory committee, created greater freedom for Aboriginal people to relocate to the city. The re-commitment to assimilation following the 1967 'Report of the NSW Parliamentary Joint Committee into Aborigines Welfare'⁴ saw the devolution of responsibilities for Aboriginal related administration to departments such as Housing, and resulted in strategies to encourage 'chain relocation' of Aboriginal people from regional areas, especially the centralised missions or reserves, to urban areas with the promise of housing.⁵

While the New South Wales Welfare Board had a controlling presence over the lives of Aboriginal people in regional centres through the reserves, the board did not have the same presence in the city.⁶ The emerging political movement in Redfern for self-determination and justice, increased opportunities arising from post-referendum federal government initiatives and greater employment prospects in the industrial areas of Sydney influenced Aboriginal families' migration to the inner-city, including Redfern and Alexandria.

The Knockout emerged within this complex economic and social context. It was initiated by six men affiliated with Koorie United: Bob Smith, Bob Morgan, Bill Kennedy, Danny Rose, Victor Wright and the late George Jackson. They formed Koorie United in response to the rapidly expanding Sydney Aboriginal community. The established Sydney-based Aboriginal sides, the Redfern All Blacks and La Perouse Blacks (or Panthers as they were sometimes called), were aligned with the South Sydney football district. There were many Aboriginal men looking for a game of football and so Koorie

4. The Report of the Joint Committee into Aborigines Welfare recommended abolishing the Welfare Board, that there be no new housing built on reserves and that the Government gradually divest itself of the Reserve lands.

5. Goodall 1995: 107.

6. For discussion of this, see Goodall 1995.



Above: The La Perouse Panthers, winners of the 1991 New South Wales Annual Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout. Photo reproduced with permission from Michael Lowe

Below: Redfern All Blacks, winners of the 2004 New South Wales Annual Rugby League Knockout. Photo by Heidi Norman



United formed joining the 'rival' Newtown Jets district, with sponsorship from Marrickville Council, where some of the committee members worked. The inaugural President was Jimmy Little. They emerged with something of a splash, taking out the premiership in 1970.⁷

The Koorie United committee were connected through kinship and the shared experience of relocating to the city. Bob Morgan, Danny Rose and Bill Kennedy hail from the New South Wales north-western town of Walgett in Gamilaroi country. Bob Smith and Victor Wright had relocated from Kemspey on the New South Wales north coast, and while the late George Jackson was based in Sydney, he also had connections with Gamilaroi as his wife was from Coonabarabran. This kinship connection extended to Jimmy Little as his wife also hails from Walgett.

Following a meeting at the Clifton Hotel, a well-known gathering place for Kooris in Redfern in the 1960s, the Koorie United committee proposed holding a state-wide Knockout competition. Prior to this there had been many town-based knockout football and basketball competitions. However, the establishment of the Knockout set out with some different objectives. Bob Morgan says:

Our concept at the time was to also have a game where people who had difficulty breaking into the big time would be on show. They could put their skills on show and the talent scouts would come and check them out.⁸

The Knockout was formed with a view to providing a stage for the many and very talented Aboriginal footballers playing at the time who had been overlooked by the talent scouts. Although there were some notable exceptions, like Bruce (La Pa) Stewart playing on the wing for Easts, Aboriginal footballers experienced difficulty breaking into the 'big time'. It was thought the Knockout would provide a chance for Aboriginal footballers to get noticed, where for reasons of racism and lack of country-based recruitment they were overlooked. There was also some talk of entering an all-Aboriginal side in the National Rugby League competition.

Secondly, as original committee member Bob Morgan said:

The Knockout was never simply about football, it was about family, it was about community, it was getting people to come together and enjoy and celebrate things rather than win the competition football.⁹

This sentiment was echoed by most participants in this research. James Miller, former Koorie United player and Knockout supporter described the event in the following way: 'It's similar to Kooris getting together for funerals and weddings and things like this'.¹⁰ Bob Smith, founding member of the Knockout, expressing a similar sentiment said:

7. Jimmie Little was also a mad keen 'Balmain Tigers' supporter, so Koorie United began playing in his beloved Black and Gold!

8. Interview with B Morgan, conducted by the author, 30 May 2004, The Entrance, Central Coast.

9. Interview with B Morgan, conducted by the author, 30 May 2004, The Entrance, Central Coast.

10. Interview with J Miller, conducted by the author, 31 August 2004, Powerhouse Museum.

It's almost got the same sort of feel about it, like when you go to funerals. It's not the same but it's still an opportunity for people to meet ... an opportunity for people to meet and renew friendships.¹¹

The first Knockout in 1971, hosted by Koorie United at Camdenville Oval, St Peters, attracted seven teams: Koorie United, Redfern All Blacks, Kempsey, La Perouse, Walgett, Moree and a combined Mt Druitt / South Coast side.

For the first few years of the Knockout, Koorie United hosted the carnival and it was won by La Perouse United (1971), Redfern All Blacks (1972-73), Koorie United (1974) and Kempsey All Blacks in 1975. With Kempsey the first non-Sydney side to win the Knockout, it was decided that the winning team would host the Knockout the following year. The Kempsey Knockout was a memorial to the late Victor Wright Senior, a long time supporter of Aboriginal Football and the Knockout. The highly prized original trophy, donated by the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs following a grant from the Commonwealth Council for Aboriginal Affairs, has the inscription 'NSW Koorie Sports Committee Annual Football Knockout "Perpetual Trophy", Donated by Foundation of Aboriginal Affairs'. After the 1975 Kempsey Knockout, the Victor Wright Senior Memorial Shield has continued as a perpetual trophy/shield awarded at the Knockout.¹²

In 2005, 35 years later, there were over 60 teams competing at the Knockout, hosted by the Redfern All Blacks Cec Patten – Ron Merritt Memorial Team. Bob Smith explained that in 1971 he hand-drew A4 cardboard signs and posted them around Redfern. The nomination fee was \$5.00 and the winner 'took all' of the \$35 prize money. In 2004 the entry fee was \$2000 and the winning team collected \$60,000 in prize money. There were also second, third and fourth place cash prizes. In addition, the women's Knockout that for a long time was a side event, in 2005 attracted 22 teams with the crowd-pleasing final played on the Monday of the long weekend.

Aside from Sydney, it has been hosted in the rural towns of Dubbo, Armidale, Bourke, Walgett and Moree and in the coastal communities of Kempsey, Maitland and Nambucca Heads.

Aboriginal people and Rugby League

The history of the Knockout and its formation in 1971 drew on existing involvement in the code of rugby league by Aboriginal people. All of the passion and success of the Knockout is continuous with this longer history. There were several all-Aboriginal rugby league sides in New South Wales that were competing in city and country competitions as early as the 1930s. Including the Redfern All Blacks and La Perouse Blacks / Warriors in the Souths Juniors competition, the Erambie All Blacks from Cowra, the Waratahs based in Dubbo, the Moree Boomerangs, a team from Bellbrook Mission in the Kempsey Valley and the Foster Hawkes – winners of the Manning Valley – Great Lakes Premierships in the 1930s, from Sunrise Station (later known as Purfleet Mission).

11. Interview with B Smith, conducted by the author, 19 September 2004, Offices of the Department of Education, Kempsey.

12. Over the 35 years of the Knockout some 35 commemorative perpetual trophies and shields have been added, including the Gamilaroi Elders Shield in 2002.



2003 Annual Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout, Maitland. Photo courtesy Koori Mail.

Colin Tatz argues that Rugby League has been 'kinder to Aborigines than any other football code'.¹³ Aboriginal men are well represented in rugby league. Tatz suggests George Green was the first Aboriginal player competing in the Premiership playing with Eastern Suburbs in 1911 and later the North Sydney 'glory team' premiership winners in 1921 and 1922. Tatz calculated that in the senior Sydney premiership competition in 1987, there were between 29 and 32 Aboriginal players, making up 9% of the players in premier and reserve grade sides.¹⁴ In the 2005 National Rugby League Grand Final, it was reported that Indigenous Australians 'will make up more than 20% of the players who will run onto the field at Telstra Stadium'.¹⁵ Perhaps this success can be attributed to the origins of the game having split from Rugby Union in the early 1900s, Rugby League came to be a sport of the working class. The South Sydney Rabbitohs, from the working class areas of Redfern were one of the foundation clubs and dominated the premiership in the early years.¹⁶

The Redfern All Blacks (RAB), who celebrated their 75th Anniversary in November 2005, has been central to the social, cultural and political history of Aboriginal

13. Tatz 1995: 10.

14. Tatz 1995: chapter 8.

15. *Sydney Morning Herald*, Weekend Edition, 1–2 October 2005: 7.

16. These tentative ideas will be developed in further work.



Redfern All Blacks, Casino, 1969. Photo courtesy Andrew Jakubowicz.

Redfern. While their participation in the South Sydney Juniors competition was more continuous from the 1960s and at different times officials contested their participation, RAB have won the Knockout ten times and on each occasion they have won back-to-back. In 2006 they won a historic four years running, along with success in the Souths Juniors district.

The establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs following the 1967 Referendum, among other things, resulted in funding being made available for Aboriginal organisations and events. The Council for Aboriginal Affairs established the Aboriginal Sports Foundation that came to fund some RAB activities, including two tours of New Zealand, dances and NADOC (National Aborigines' Day Observance Committee) activities.

The Council also funded NADOC week events, such as the sponsorship, along with the State Bank, of the prize money for the winners of the regional Knockout in Moree in 1969.¹⁷ In 1969 RAB travelled to Moree, Casino and Bega to participate in NADOC week regional knockouts. This was covered in *New Dawn* with a picture of RAB on the front cover in June 1970, wearing red and white jerseys.¹⁸

¹⁷. *Dawn Magazine* 1969, 'Report on NADOC week activities in Moree'. 'NADOC' in more recent times is spelt 'NAIDOC' and refers to the national week of celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture, generally held in early July.

Town-based knockouts continue, although these are largely organised as lead-up competitions for the main Knockout in October. The lead-up Knockouts are often fundraisers and provide a 'practice run' for teams, they include Canberra, Dubbo, Ballina and Blacktown. Most of the teams will travel the distance to attend the lead-up Knockouts. This is evident in the 2005 winners: in Canberra, Walgett BAC won, and the Newcastle Emus took out the Dubbo Knockout.

From the 1970s Aboriginal football teams began organising and competing in country rugby league competitions. For example *New Dawn* in 1972 featured a picture of the Wilcannia Boomerangs, and reported that they were a 'first grade, all-Aboriginal Rugby League Team ... in the Broken Hill District League Competition', formed in 1970 with the help of a grant from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs.¹⁹ Similarly, in Armidale the all-Aboriginal NARWAN Eels were formed in 1977 in response to the sense that Aboriginal players weren't getting a 'run' in the Group 5 Country League Association. Mitchell Morris, Colin Ahoy and the late Lance Moran and Catholic priest David Perrett formed the all-Aboriginal NARWAN Eels who went on to win the prestigious country league Caltex Shield and the Clayton's Cup along with five consecutive premierships, as well as the Knockout, in 1980!²⁰

The Moree NADOC celebrations in September 1970 hosted a football Knockout carnival and a Ball as well as a basketball competition and performance by the National Black Theatre. *New Dawn* reported the football competition was won by Moree-based 'Wirajarai [sic] club' who received a \$300 cheque from the Rural Bank.²¹ Club President, Mr Tommy Cain said the prize money would be donated to the 'Wirajarai P & C Association' and a smaller amount to the Mission-based Sisters of Charity 'in recognition of their services to Aborigines'.²² This example provides some insight into community capacity to organise, an indication of private sponsorship and support, as well as a sense of the changing political environment from Mission to community control. The football carnival can be seen as being in the middle of these developments.

Football and politics

The football was a vehicle for Aboriginal people to gather and organise in an otherwise authoritarian and controlled environment of restricted movement and association. It is also possible to understand the NADOC celebrations and particularly football competitions, and the social and political interactions that ensued, as impetus for relocations to the city, if only because of the possibility to earn money through football.

Mr Ken Brindle writing in *New Dawn* in June 1970 confirms this sentiment in saying:

when youngsters first arrive in Sydney, a club consisting of their own people, where they can become involved and feel part of, assists them immensely to settle down in the first crucial ... weeks.²³

18. *New Dawn*, June 1970, 1(3): cover. Participants in the research recalled RAB playing in the red and white colours of St George, following sponsorship from the Club.

19. *New Dawn*, April 1972, 3(1): inside cover.

20. Tatz 1996: 84.

21. *New Dawn*, September 1970, 1(6): 5.

22. *New Dawn*, September 1970, 1(6): 5.



Redfern All Blacks tour to New Zealand 1971. Photo courtesy of the Mason Family

He goes on to say that the club:

affords them good training in management ... and responsibility [and often] become involved in their players problems [and] ... help to find employment, accommodation and quite often legal assistance for minor offences'.²⁴

RAB held dances and cabarets to finance its activities at the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs. Bands, such as Max Silva's legendary 'Black Lace' and 'Silver Lining' were regular performers at the Foundation and other venues. Ken Brindle also forged links with other supportive activists groups including the Communist Party of Australia and Australian Aboriginal Fellowship.

Brindle, in acknowledging the National Aboriginal Sports Foundation grant of \$1000 for the RAB 1971 New Zealand tour, said:

the Commonwealth Office of Aboriginal Affairs does realise the value of Aboriginal participation in sport, ... all the placard waving, demonstrating and demands will not open one tenth of the doors that can be opened through sport.²⁵

23. *New Dawn*, June 1970, 1(3): 1.

24. *New Dawn*, June 1970, 1(3): 1.

25. *New Dawn*, June 1970, 1(3): 2.

Similarly, Ray Vincent with some 60 years of association with RAB said, 'When you think about it, the Blacks have been political since way back when ... without realising they were making a statement, but they were'. He argues that, 'The Blacks are the longest running political organisation that we have'.²⁶ In reflecting on RAB, Ray Vincent, said:

Politics is always a part of what we were doing but it was never the driving force. It was more about sport and more about family and more about community. And I think that's the way it's got to be.²⁷

Ken Brindle, RAB President, was involved in a range of community activities, including proposals to the Council for Aboriginal Affairs for a community centre. The Council for Aboriginal Affairs in responding to these requests had their own ideas about governing arrangements for the emerging Aboriginal organisations in Redfern and advocated a central body to oversee the Aboriginal Medical Service, Aboriginal Legal Service and RAB. Similarly, Brindle in organising the New Zealand tours, articulated them as cultural exchanges and community development.

The organisation of football teams was a response to a sense of exclusion and desire for greater success in rugby league. The motivation behind the formation of the NARWAN Eels for a 'fair go', along with the Knockout organisers wanting Aboriginal players to 'get noticed' is evidence of this. Ken Brindle saw RAB as a means to build community and cultural capacity and pride. The organisation of football teams carried with them far greater significance — they were vehicles for community development and the re-forming of new communities.

While this can be understood as political activism, a different articulation of politics emerges. It is about assertion of identity and strategic efforts to maintain and build cultural continuity as much as a campaign for rights and justice. It is a more Aboriginal centred account of political activism that expresses culture and family as central to rights and justice.

Kinship and the Knockout

Further to economic and social context, kinship connections have continually underpinned the way Aboriginal people settled in the urban context of Sydney. Family or kinship connections were reflected in the 'second wave' of migration of Aboriginal people to Sydney and how these relations were maintained and renewed in a changing environment. In the early years, as the inner-city Aboriginal community expanded, and throughout the history of the Knockout, the football teams have formed a central base around which communities have gathered and aligned.

The Knockout as a modern day corroboree continues to be organised along kinship and nation-based affiliations. The teams are clan or family-based and in other cases seek to rebuild, not necessarily along bloodlines, but modelled on patterns of interaction, relationship and connections in new environments.

Koorie United formed in response to new and changing communities. This can largely be understood in terms of the late 1960s pattern of migration of Aboriginal peo-

²⁶ Interview with R Vincent, conducted by the author, 25 August 2004, Redfern.

²⁷ Interview with R Vincent, conducted by the author, 25 August 2004, Redfern.

ple to Sydney, particularly Redfern and the inner-city. While older families who migrated to Redfern in the pre-war era were affiliated with RAB and La Perouse was similarly linked with the La Perouse community and South Coast families, Koorie United and RAB were friendly rivals that reflected different cultural groupings and social and economic experiences.

While the Redfern community is strongly associated with the area known as 'the Block', before the Whitlam Government's handing over of the land to the Aboriginal Housing Company in the early 1970s, Koori families occupied Caroline Street and surrounds. The Vincent family for example shifted from Singleton to Redfern before the Second World War. The Madden, Hinton, Lester, Davidson, Robinson and Lord families also lived in the Caroline Street and surrounds. These older families, that pre-date the 1960s wave of migration to the inner city strongly identified with RAB, a connection that endures today. The formation of Koorie United can be read as a response to what were already established kin- and community-based affiliations as well as the desire to create means by which new and changing communities could associate and organise, and play football.

To understand the ongoing kin and community-based connections the recent example of RAB is useful. When RAB players entered the 'Cec Patten—Ron Merritt memorial side' in the Knockout in 2003 they combined both the desire to bring their communities and families together and honour those who had made a contribution to the community. Wes Patten and Graham Merritt organised the team to honour their late fathers and the contribution they made to the establishment of the legal service and other organisations and to RAB.²⁸ Ron Merritt's wife, Mrs Lorraine Merritt was a Vincent, one of the very early Redfern families living on Caroline Street. Phyllis Patten (who married Cec Patten) and Ron Merritt are cousins. Both Cec Patten and Ron Merritt, with a passion for RAB, came to be best friends. We see in this example extended family relations that are both historical in terms of the relationship to Redfern and kin-based.

The Vincent family have a long association with RAB. Ray Vincent recalls being carried out on his father's shoulders at Redfern oval when he was about four years old before World War Two.²⁹ He spoke of his uncles and brothers playing for RAB and now his nephews, including Graham Merritt. For the Vincent family their association spans the history of RAB across four generations. It was reported that there was one small 'hiccup' in this long association. In 1976 Ron Merritt formed the Knockout winning side, the Louis St Dodgers.³⁰ Graham Merritt remembers a period of 'no-speak' between his parents as a result of this!

There are many other families who have a similar cross-generational association with RAB. The Madden family for example, introduced a memorial trophy in honour of the late Lee Madden at the 2004 Knockout. Lee's father, Uncle Charles 'Chicka' Madden, along with his brothers and uncles are life members of RAB.

28. Interview with Graham Merritt, conducted by the author, 26 August 2004, University of Technology, Sydney.

29. Interview with Ray Vincent, conducted by the author, 25 August 2004, Redfern.

30. Louis Street is one of the four streets that make up 'the Block'.

Further to this long-standing kin-based connection, RAB also came to be a home for many Aboriginal people who experienced life in institutions. This was particularly the case for former residents of Kinchela Boys Home (KBH). At the 2002 Knockout the 'Kinchela Boys Home Ken Brindle Memorial Shield' was presented to the most promising player in the grand final.³¹ The shield honoured Ken Brindle's association with RAB and paid tribute to the association of KBH residences and their special place in the Redfern community. In a very moving ceremony just prior to the grand final, the former residents walked on to the oval and were presented to the crowd as a smoking ritual was carried out. Whilst a very sad moment, the ceremony affirmed the significant relationship to 'place'.

The RAB memorial side and the presentation of memorial trophies and shields is a tribute to individuals that reflects complex social, political and cultural relations. RAB is in some ways different to other teams in that they are a team with a long history that competes throughout the season while other teams form for the purpose of competing in the Knockout. While RAB competes in the Souths Juniors competition, it is the Knockout where the ceremonies and acknowledgements take place.

David Widders in organising the Armidale team the Echidnas explained his motivation was to bring his family back together. He said that since the passing of his Nan and Pop the family had gone in 'all different directions' with some family members not talking to others. Organising a team and entering the Knockout was a way to get the Widders and extended family reunited. His concern was that, 'we only ever seem to get together for sad reasons, like funerals'.³² Widders explained that while his involvement with sport has been extensive, getting the Echidnas to the Knockout was the most rewarding experience for him. He also explained that the name, the Echidnas, was his grandfather's totem and the first Knockout game they played coincided with the anniversary of the passing of their Pop. Widders interpreted this as a sign that organising the team was culturally 'right'.

Similarly, for other towns, where the New South Wales Welfare Board force relocated families from distant regions, family-based connections are affirmed through Knockout teams. Large centres like Dubbo are represented by different teams, such as the Pacemakers and Googars, at the Knockout. While from the same town and community the teams draw from different families that in part reflect the history of connection to place and origin. The Googars, competing in the Knockout since 1988, was formed by the late Tom Gordon. In 2000, his family entered the 'Tom Gordon Memorial Team' in the Knockout where his five sons played in his honour.³³

Danny Thorne was motivated to form the South-West Metropolitan Waratahs in 2002 for different reasons.³⁴ Thorne explains, in the absence of a traditional or tribal association in the Campbelltown area, south-west of Sydney, it was appropriate to come up with a team emblem that was representative. He said the Waratah, traditional

31. This award was won by Don Walker playing with Mulli Mulli in 2002.

32. Interview with D Widders, conducted by the author, April 2005, University of Technology, Sydney.

33. *Daily Liberal*, 'Brothers honour dad: Gordon boys aiming for knockout carnival win', 29 September 2000: 42.

34. Interview with D Thorne, conducted by the author, August 2004, Campbelltown.

to the area and the New South Wales floral emblem, captured the whole Aboriginal community. He formed the team to build a greater sense of community and to support younger players with their identity. He suggests the Knockout is an opportunity for young players to meet their extended families which is significant as many younger members of the community seem lost to their identity and culture and sometimes, he says, 'where you are second generation born in the city, you can lost those contacts with your country'.³⁵ Thorne set out to build a sense of community and connection in Campbelltown and south-west Sydney amongst Aboriginal people. Thorne also experienced the move to the city from Walgett and played with Koorie United.

This sentiment was reiterated by Barry Duncan regarding the team he founded in 1997, the Central Coast Pelicans.³⁶ Duncan explained that he felt the Central Coast community were struggling with a sense of identity. While they were on Darkinjung land the community consisted of members from all over New South Wales and elsewhere without a traditional base or connection to country. While they were a 'community' when it came to Land Council and other business, for the Knockout most who had relocated to the coast barracked with their 'home' communities. Putting a side in the Knockout was a means by which the Central Coast community could become united and also address the very specific issues for the central coast community, such as the very high incidence of youth suicide.

These examples can be seen to be clan- or family-based and in other cases seek to rebuild, on this pattern of interaction, relationships and connections in new environments. This exemplifies the richness and inter-connectedness of contemporary Aboriginal lives that continues to be kinship-based and modelled on kin or family systems of organisation. The organisation of football teams for the Knockout reflects Aboriginal aspirations for family and community that are both traditional and responsive to economic change and its social effects, and to Government policy. This includes relocation to urban centres for work as industries changed, and areas such as the central coast and greater Sydney came to be centres for relocation. Government policies, such as the concentration in reserves and integration through housing and urban relocation. These are matched by Aboriginal people seeking to maintain and renew community affiliations.

The political economy of the Knockout

This final section turns to the political economy of the Knockout. The Knockout is an example of entrepreneurial and organisational skill and community capacity. It attracts thousands of Aboriginal people. Over the last few years there have been from 45 to 60 teams competing. Each team comprises 25 players plus coach, trainers and officials. This alone makes up 2000 or more participants. There are no official records of crowds or gate takings and estimates vary considerably. There were between 12,000 and 18,000 spectators over the four days. During the long weekend in October 2004, in the evenings of the Knockout weekend, every pub and club in Redfern and surrounds was packed to capacity with most closing their doors, including Souths Leagues Club. For this research project, it has been a difficult task to gather economic data to estimate the

35. Interview with D Thorne, conducted by the author, August 2004, Campbelltown.

36. Interview with Barry Duncan, conducted by the author, April 2005, Redfern.

economics of the Knockout where businesses have been reluctant to disclose information about their takings for the long weekend. However, Warren Mundine, former Dubbo Councillor, reported that the Dubbo Chamber of Commerce calculated the economic contribution of the Knockout for Dubbo in 1999 to be \$4 million.³⁷ The Nambucca Valley Chamber of Commerce, Eunice Peachey President of the Pacemakers and others also referred to this figure of \$4 million. The Honorable Member Jan Burnswood said in Parliament that, 'It was the most successful carnival ever held and in 1999 more than \$4 million was brought into the Dubbo economy through accommodation, hospitality et cetera'.³⁸

Both Nambucca and Dubbo Chambers of Commerce said it was standard in estimating the economics of an event to calculate \$200 per person. It is reasonable to suggest that the actual figure could be more than this estimate given the entertainment associated with each evening of the Knockout. If the calculation is based on a figure of \$250 per head per day and the overall crowd is conservatively estimated at 13,500, the Knockout can be estimated to generate approximately \$3.4 million for a host town.

The Dubbo Pacemakers and Wellington Wedgetails combined organising committee for the 1999 Knockout estimated that the expenditure for the event amounted to approximately \$300,000. The committee made a profit of \$30,000 that was channelled back into the community for employment, health and sporting venues.³⁹ The Redfern All Blacks organising committee for the 2004 Knockout also said that 'before a ball had even been kicked', the organising committee required a starting budget of \$200,000.⁴⁰ The organising committee were meeting every week at Souths Leagues Club from November 2003. As the Knockout drew closer the committee met daily. Ricky Lyons, Committee Secretary said, 'organising the Knockout basically has taken over my life'. Graham Merrit of the RAB organising committee, referred to the organising of the Knockout as 'a big headache'. The organising committees of the Knockout meet and negotiate with a whole array of Government and agencies, including Local Councils and their various committees, police, ambulance and roads and traffic control.

The report by the New South Wales Annual Rugby League Association (NARLA) of the Knockout in Armidale gives some indication of both the level of organisational complexity and expenditure associated with hosting the Knockout. The package for the NARLA Knockout, distributed amongst delegates, features colour photos of fields, accommodation directory, lists of all tasks, operating budget: just about every detail from grounds hire to footballs, clocks and hooters. This document provides insight to the level of organisational skill involved in staging a competition with so many participants, at an unprepared venue with such large crowds. The NARLA Knockout in Armidale employed a co-ordinator for 14 weeks in the lead-up to the Knockout while the Bourke Local Council employed a consultant to assist with the organisation of the

37. Interview with W Mundine, conducted by the author, August 2004, Office of the NSW Native Title Service, Redfern, New South Wales.

38. The Hon. Jan Burnswood, *NSW Legislative Council Hansard*, 5 April 2000: 4147.

39. The Hon. Jan Burnswood, *NSW Legislative Council Hansard*, 5 April 2000: 4147.

40. This was reported by two interview participants and committee members, Ricky Lyons (25 August 04) and Graham Merritt (August 2004), and at the meeting of the organising committee (26 April 2005).

Knockout when they hosted it in 1996. However, the Knockout is run by a committee of volunteers and many hundreds of volunteers carrying out related tasks.

The Knockout is an enormous event to organise with most communities starting this process from scratch. There is no template or guide on 'how to organise the Knockout', in many cases there are those who have been involved in organising Knockouts before who lend support and expertise. Committees book the grounds, prepare the grounds such as line-marking, emblem stamping, recruit referees and line's men, clean the grounds, provision of toilets, cleaning of toilets, in some cases the construction of amenities, transport between fields, security, footballs, football pumps, clocks, hooters, tables, chairs, tents for elders, marquee for different communities and public liability.

It is not hard to imagine the revenue generated over the course of the long weekend as a result of Knockout visitors. Imagine this kind of economic activity in small country towns—like Walgett with two motels, one supermarket and four pubs and clubs. In other towns Armidale, Dubbo and Maitland it was reported in the local media that all accommodation was fully booked over the long weekend as a result of the Knockout. However, despite the financial injection into regional economies, in some instances the holding of the Knockout has been opposed by the business community. This was the case in Nambucca Heads where the local business community spoke against the hosting of the Knockout in letters to the local paper and local council. They claimed health and safety concerns.

The Knockout cannot be measured in terms of economic contributions to the local business and towns alone. When Barwon Aboriginal Corporation (BAC), Walgett, hosted the Knockout in 1989, the club built an amenities block including change rooms and showers for players at the Oval. BAC also installed lights and built a grandstand. The economic contribution can therefore also be seen in terms of significant infrastructure. The facilities that BAC built, largely by volunteers, were assets for the whole community to use.

In addition, there is significant employment generated for the duration of the weekend. Many of the pubs and clubs recruit local Aboriginal people to work behind the bar and as security, there are also staff on the grounds, including the gates, security, food stalls, Government services and promotion stalls.

Each team that participates raises a significant amount of money to fund their Knockout campaign. The non-refundable entry fee for each team in 2004 was \$2000. On top of this each team completely outfits their players, team officials and supporters. Most players and officials would be equipped with jerseys, shorts, socks at the minimum and more likely, drink bottles, caps, carry bag and casual clothes for evening wear along with supporters caps and T-shirts. All of these would normally be dated with the name of the side, year and location of the Knockout. The basic outfit of jersey, shorts and socks was valued, as a special deal for the Knockout team, as \$3,000.

Danny Thorne, President of the Waratahs, estimated that they would need about \$30,000 to compete in the Knockout. This covers accommodation, registration, food and drink for players and marquee for their supporters for the weekend and bus. For the last three years the Waratahs have been sponsored by developers Mirvac. The Armidale Echidnas raised \$20,000 to fund their campaign to Sydney in 2001. This included accommodation, hiring of a bus, players and supporters gear. For South West Metro

their costs are significantly less than for teams who travel from Bourke and Moree where whole teams and community require transport and accommodation.

The Moree Boomerangs for the 2001 Knockout campaign were sponsored by Joblink, The Aboriginal Employment Strategy, Rolf's Fuel and Exhaust, Raylen's Café, Brighann Ginning, Irritek, Moree Hotel, Elco Australia, Bignall's Tender Meats, Moree Freight Service, Lowrey's Small Motors, Kenway and Clark and Moree Place Management.⁴¹ The Moree Shamrock Warriors fundraised with raffles and a small amount of sponsorship from Tjapiya Security and Sullivan's Newsagency. These sponsorships indicate considerable resourcefulness and credibility amongst the Aboriginal community along with goodwill from the business community.

Conclusion

The Knockout has been an enormously successful and significant event that is passionately embraced by the New South Wales Aboriginal community. The Knockout emerged in the context of considerable social, economic, cultural and political change. It is a vehicle for the continuation and regeneration of cultural traditions. It has been the means by which new communities are forged, where love is realised and stars made. For others it is the way to reconnect and celebrate being Aboriginal in an all-Aboriginal celebratory and successful environment. This success is in terms of survival, sporting success and the very ability to convene such a large event. This study shows how Aboriginal aspirations have responded to economic change and its social effects, and to government policy. This paper has demonstrated the centrality of the Knockout as an affirmation of culture, identity and community or clan-based affiliations.

Acknowledgements

Research on the Knockout was made possible by a grant from AIATSIS and Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning at the University of Technology, Sydney. The author wishes to thank Professor Gillian Cowlishaw, Associate Professor Heather Goodall, Dr Bob Morgan, Cameron Muir and Sonny Edwards for comments on this draft and research support.

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Public occasions, Indigenous selves: three Ngarrindjeri autobiographies

Tim Rowse

Through Indigenous autobiography Indigenous Australians have found voice as historians.¹ To write the history of one's own life has become the dominant genre of Indigenous written historical practice.² Note that I am using the word 'write' loosely to refer to what we readers suppose the Indigenous author to have done. In this paper, I do not care whether the 'author' is the sole producer of the text, and I do not differentiate between written/edited and spoken/transcribed/edited modes of production. Rather, my reading strategy is to assume that these three books by Doris Kartinyeri, Veronica Brodie and Dulcie Wilson are authentically autobiographical. Notwithstanding our knowledge that the mode of literary production involves persons and institutions in addition to the author, we can read autobiography as a person's knowing narration of his or her own life.

1. The corpus of writings 'Australian Indigenous autobiography' is not well defined. An online annotated bibliography of Indigenous autobiography would be a good project, along the lines of David Brumble III's *American Indian autobiography* (1988). There will always be problems of classification. Is *The town grew up dancing* (Green and Rubuntja 2002) a biography or an autobiography? Should we include Gordon Matthews' *An Australian son* (1996) if that book addresses the (in)significance of the author not being of Aboriginal descent? Vaulting over problems of genre definition, I estimate that there are at least 100 items to include in such a bibliography, from essays to books, and that about 65% of the authors are female. The best known is probably Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987). The price of Morgan's success is that her book has a US edition with a picture of Uluru on its cover. There are signs of the emergence of a critical canon of Indigenous autobiographies; a tendency whose prematurity I discuss in 'Indigenous autobiography in Australia and the United States' (Rowse 2004).
2. For some US writings relevant to Indigenous autobiography, see HD Wang *Sending my heart back across the years* (1992); J Watson and S Smith (1992); D Murray *Forked tongues: speech, writing and representation in North American Indian texts* (1991); LW O'Brien *Plains Indian autobiographies* (1973). The work of Arnold Krupat stands out as a continuing thoughtful engagement with North American Indian autobiography: *For those who come after* (1985); *The voice in the margin: Native American literature and the canon* (1989); 'Native American autobiography and the synecdochic self' (1992); *Native American autobiography: an anthology* (1994). On Australian Indigenous autobiography there is a growing literature that I will not try to survey here. It includes: D McCooey *Artful histories* (1996); Anne Brewster *Aboriginal women's autobiography* (1996) and 'Aboriginal life writing and globalisation: Doris Pilkington's *Follow the rabbit-proof fence* (2002); R Dalziell *Shameful autobiographies* (1999); J Hooton *Stories of herself when young* (1990); G Whitlock *The intimate empire: reading women's autobiography* (2000).

Autobiography rests on the idea that humanity is made up of unique individuals whose individuality (a) is of intrinsic interest and value, and (b) can be understood as having its own history. Autobiography, like some other literary genres such as the novel, serves a sensibility that acknowledges and values the intentionality and interiority of persons. Autobiography, again like some other genres of writing such as biography, assumes that the object of its representation has a history, that is, that there can be a story of the contingencies of an individual's interactions with peoples and things beyond him/herself. Autobiography is different from the novel in that the question of factual truthfulness is relevant to an autobiography. The particular claim to be truthful that autobiography makes is that the autobiographer has privileged access to the interiority that is essential to his/her uniqueness. 'No one can know better than I what I have thought, what I have wished; I alone have the privilege of discovering myself from the other side of the mirror — nor can I be cut off by the wall of privacy.'³ This unique degree of access to the remembered interior of the narrated self differentiates autobiography from biography. Even biographies based on intimate diaries cannot match the autobiographer's access to his or her interiority.⁴ Autobiographical truth is in this sense 'interested', not disinterested; our respect for autobiography rests partly on an implicit conviction that 'no one can better do justice to himself than the interested party'.⁵

Autobiography tends to unify the narrated life, to emphasise its underlying continuities as it moves towards the 'I' that the autobiographer, at the time of writing, understands him or herself to be. Weintraub prefers to call this movement to the present 'development'; he considers the word 'unfolding' to be better suited to non-human life forms.⁶ 'Development' conveys a necessary element of human intentionality, of reflective interaction with the world's contingencies that is missing from 'unfolding'. We can read autobiographies as cohering around a point of view on the many contingencies of that development, a point of view that sorts events in terms of their relevance to the plotted trajectory of the life story. The autobiography is a 'means to self knowledge thanks to the fact that it recomposes and interprets a life in its totality'.⁷ Autobiographies thus evince a sense of destiny: the life I tell produced the 'I' that is now narrating. As Gusdorf says, 'the original sin of autobiography is first one of logical coherence and rationalisation'.⁸

If self-conceptions are so important, where do autobiographers get them? Weintraub suggests that the possible sources of self-conceptions have shifted since the

3. Gusdorf 1980: 35.

4. I do not assume that every autobiography exploits the genre's capacity for intimate self-revelation. Indeed, some autobiographies are intriguing because they lack what is usually understood to be a language for signifying the intimate self. I found this to be a feature of Ruby Langford's *Don't take your love to town* (Rowse 1993a). This raises the interesting question of how readers are trained to regard certain aspects of 'self' as intimate or deep and others as external and public. An effective practice of reading will include some reflection on these distinctions, which are easily taken for granted.

5. Gusdorf 1980: 36.

6. Weintraub 1975: 830.

7. Gusdorf 1980: 40.

8. Gusdorf 1980: 41.

Renaissance as 'individuality' has come to be more valued. Cultures hold out models that express values and convictions, but such models, he argues, have been rivalled by the growing value attached to the idea that each self may demand to be understood in its own unique terms.⁹ Invited to make sense of themselves in terms of our culture's models, autobiographers can see themselves as approximations to these models or as deviations from them.

Television journalist Stan Grant writes of himself as an Aboriginal man. He introduces *The tears of strangers* by announcing that he is uneasy with the received ideas of an Aboriginal life. White Australia, he writes,

is recreating Aboriginal society as it imagines it should be; it's a blackness seen through white eyes and offers blacks something to believe in, or even cash in on. But it offers no freedom, simply subservience. We have moved beyond the fact of race and arrived at race as a concept. We are chained to the predictability of Aboriginal identity by a laziness that fails to grapple with our inconsistencies and fraudulence; we remain perplexed by our very existence.¹⁰

Few Indigenous authors are as self-laceratingly at odds as Stan Grant with what they declare to be the available models of Aboriginality.

Sally Morgan, in contrast, builds her story of self-discovery upon a notion of Aboriginal identity which she does not question: identity based on acknowledged descent. For Morgan, the question: 'Who am I?' can be answered with certainty, as long as she challenges the lies that have obscured her descent. Presenting herself as a truth-seeker, she interrogates the heritage of shame and deceit that obscured the truth of her descent and identity.¹¹ *My place* starts and finishes with an established notion of Aboriginality as descent. There is no such secure model for Stan Grant. He cannot accept descent as an adequate criterion of Aboriginality because he is so conscious of the variety in the life experiences of people of Aboriginal descent. As an Aboriginal 'success' he feels guiltily estranged from Aborigines whose lives are blighted. His book cannot formulate a notion of Aboriginal identity that would accommodate the huge differences among people of Aboriginal descent. He mercilessly exposes his own and others' inclination to truncate this Aboriginal heterogeneity. 'We have a perverse longing, a lingering attachment to the injustice and oppression that we imagine nourish our identity. Shamelessly, we compete for victim status and turn pain and loss into virtues.'¹² To be middle class, he tells us, is to embody an Aboriginality that cannot speak its name. The question that Stan Grant poses to himself about his Aboriginality gets no secure answer in *The tears of strangers*.

The Morgan/Grant contrast illustrates the different ways that Indigenous autobiographers may handle received notions of Aboriginality. Neither can ignore that certain notions of Aboriginality are established in Australia's public culture. For both authors, Aboriginality as descent is a point of reference. 'Descent' works for Morgan; she uncovers the truth of her descent. Grant's descent has never been hidden from him,

9. Weintraub 1975: 837.

10. Grant 2002: 5.

11. Morgan 1987.

12. Grant 2002: 5.

but he finds descent insufficient as a basis for his identity because of the weight he attaches to the class and generational differences among those of Indigenous descent.

There are other public notions of 'Aboriginality' with which an individual may align their individuality. 'Suffering' works for Doris Kartinyeri (as I will show below) as shared Aboriginal heritage.

All autobiographers whose self-understanding includes being 'Aboriginal' must negotiate some relationship with some publicly available notion of 'Aboriginality'. What is individual (my life) will be explained in reference to what is understood to be typical of Aboriginal Australians.

Aboriginal autobiography is a recent phenomenon in Australian history; it occurs within what Jeremy Beckett calls 'welfare colonialism', in which authorities solicit, rather than discourage, 'Aboriginalities'.¹³ Australia's public culture now abounds in notions of 'the Aboriginal' – many of them affirmative, many still devaluing. Do representations of Aboriginality have a disciplinary effect on those who understand themselves to be, and who present themselves as, 'Aborigines'? Elizabeth Povinelli evokes the multiplicity and the incommensurability of the regimes of recognition of Aboriginality. If Aborigines are under the influence of these regimes, then they are multiply influenced and have some latitude in their invocations of identities. 'We have here ... a set of incommensurate, though often mutually referring, state regimes sitting alongside a set of incommensurate, though often mutually referring, local social regimes. Both sets are constantly invaginating each other as people make use of them to advance their particular social aspirations.'¹⁴ As Gill Cowlshaw has recently argued, we should not suppose that there are points of correspondence between professional and vernacular understandings of Aborigines' collective history.¹⁵ Both Povinelli and Cowlshaw, as I understand them, are pointing to the space for an author to puzzle over the relationship between 'me' and the public Aboriginalities of which 'I' may or may not be an instance.

One of the tasks of Aboriginal autobiography is to invite reflection on the relationship between widely available public representations of 'the Aboriginal experience' and that which the autobiographer understands to be unique to him/herself. Indigenous Australians who are addressed as the 'Aboriginal' objects of governmental concern have the task or the opportunity to respond to this address. We can understand their behaviour and their expression, particularly their autobiographies, as a response – compliant or resistant – to what the established public accounts of Aboriginality say it is. There may be many sources and occasions for these representations of Aboriginality, and many ways to feel comfortable or uncomfortable in one's relationship to them.¹⁶

Three Ngarrindjeri selves

The Ngarrindjeri people of south-eastern South Australia were exposed to an extraordinary burst of public attention to their heritage in the years 1994 to 2001, in what has

13. For a discussion of Beckett's and similar arguments see Rowse 1993b: 53-9.

14. Povinelli 2006: 157.

15. Cowlshaw 2005.

become known as the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Affair. In three autobiographies — Dulcie Wilson's *The cost of crossing bridges*, Doris Kartinyeri's *Kicking the tin* and Veronica Brodie's *My side of the bridge* we can see different ways that Ngarrindjeri women have responded to the contested representations of Ngarrindjeri by narrating their individual Ngarrindjeri-ness.¹⁷

In July 1994, the federal Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Robert Tickner invoked Aboriginal heritage protection legislation to place a 25-year ban on the construction of a bridge that would connect Hindmarsh Island to the mainland. He relied on the testimony of certain Ngarrindjeri people, backed by reports from 'experts', that the bridge would damage areas of water and land that were sacred in the secret traditions of Ngarrindjeri women. The ban was controversial. One of the most serious objections came from some Ngarrindjeri women who denied that there was a body of customary secret knowledge endowing the bridge area with sacred significance. These objectors did not necessarily want the bridge; they were angry at what they saw as a misrepresentation of Ngarrindjeri heritage by those who had asked for the ban on the bridge. From June to December 1995, the South Australian government's Royal Commission investigated the 'dissident' women's allegation that the 'secret women's business' was a fabrication. Most of those who proposed the bridge ban and believed in the secret women's business refused to appear before the Royal Commission. The Royal Commissioner, Iris Stevens, found the secret women's business to have been fabricated. An investigation by Justice Jane Mathews in 1996 advised the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs John Heron that the bridge site did have genuine customary significance for the women who had supported the bridge ban. In her report, which was not widely circulated, she wrote that because these women chose not to reveal to her the secrets of the site, she was unable to conclude that the building of the bridge would be a serious breach of Ngarrindjeri law.

The bridge was constructed.

Meanwhile, developers whose interests had been threatened by Tickner's ban sued him and several of the 'experts' on which he had relied. In his judgment on this case in 2001, Justice von Doussa critically reviewed the 1995 Stevens Royal Commission, discrediting its finding of 'fabrication'. Thus, over a seven-year period, two competing representations of the content of Ngarrindjeri law had been put before the public, and each of these representations had been both supported and contradicted by a Royal Commissioner and two judges. The case raised the question of who has the authority to speak for the Ngarrindjeri — a question whose answer cannot avoid some delving into the life history of key Ngarrindjeri persons.¹⁸

16. For example, ethnographic representations of Indigenous people may give an account of their culture that brings a sense of shame. Some Ngarrindjeri people did not feel comfortable with the ethnographic representation of Ngarrindjeri culture in Berndt and Berndt (1993) — a book published more than fifty years after the fieldwork on which it was based. It seems that some Ngarrindjeri were upset at the book's intimate sexual material and at its passages about Ngarrindjeri sorcery (Simon 2003: 115).

17. Wilson 1998; Kartinyeri 2000; Brodie 2002.

18. I strongly recommend Margaret Simon's *The meeting of the waters* (Simon 2003) as a narrative of the Hindmarsh Island affair.

Dulcie Wilson

Dulcie Wilson was one of the leading critics of the claim that there was secret women's law threatened by the proposed bridge. She wrote *The cost of crossing bridges* in the wake of the Royal Commission that vindicated her dissidence, but before the von Doussa judgment reinstated the credibility of the women's law. Wilson's book is only partly an explicit commentary on the Hindmarsh Island dispute: the final third of its 187 pages, titled 'Today's bridges', is a passionate and triumphant account of her own part in it. Much of the book was conceived and executed before that controversy erupted. That is certainly true of the middle section, about one-fifth of the book, in which her husband Lindsay remembers his working life in the south-east of South Australia ('Lindsay's bridges'). Lindsay died in April 1994, before 'the Hindmarsh Island saga reared its ugly head'.¹⁹ The book offers no definite information as to whether Dulcie composed the first 90 pages ('Early bridges') before or after she began to speak her mind on Hindmarsh Island. 'Early bridges' is about growing up at Raukkan (Point McLeay Mission), marrying Lindsay, leaving Raukkan and working in the Salvation Army. The narrative of her pre-Hindmarsh life establishes Dulcie as a devoutly Christian Ngarrindjeri who is proud of her Aboriginal heritage.

Placed in front of these three long sections are two short pieces of writing that function as prologues. The first ('Prologue') recalls the moment of Lindsay's death, her grief and her decision to write: 'doing something positive, which is not only therapy for my loneliness, but will, I hope, bring enlightenment and understanding to those who read my story'.²⁰ In the second, 'My awakening', Dulcie commits herself to revealing that certain Aboriginal people were misrepresenting Aboriginal culture, history and aspirations. This announces the point of her book: to correct prevailing misrepresentations of Aboriginal culture, in particular the erroneous (to Dulcie) view that there is 'secret women's business' on Hindmarsh Island. The contemporary self projected by Dulcie — the book's controlling figure — is that of a virtuous truth-teller, a Ngarrindjeri Christian who courageously stands up to the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal 'proponents' of the secret and sacred law of Hindmarsh Island. How does the autobiographical narrative substantiate that self?

Dulcie Rigney was born on Raukkan in 1932; she grew up at a time when both law and social norms understood caste and colour to be determining and indicative of character. She tells us that her skin was relatively white (a photo confirms this). 'We were never really accepted into the Aboriginal community because we were tainted by our European inheritance, nor were we accepted by the white community because we came from an Aboriginal mission with the stigma of primitive man. We were people in limbo with nowhere to go.'²¹ And the response of Raukkan's children to her colour caused her to be 'shy and introverted ... with no confidence in myself'.²² As an adult she learned from her uncle Bruce that she should not ask questions about her family's past; family trees, for these people of mixed descent, were contentious, and knowledge of the past had the potential to hurt and to 'disgrace ... the family name and honour'.²³ These

19. Wilson 1998: 139.

20. Wilson 1998: 4.

21. Wilson 1998: 15-16.

22. Wilson 1998: 15.

cautionary words introduce a relatively impersonal account of her childhood in which the Raukkan community's hard work, cleanliness, piety and material austerity are prominent themes.

The community in which she grew up, from 1932 to 1957, consisted of four or five hundred people, mostly living in one or two bedroom cottages built of sandstone or of timber and iron. Dulcie's mother was a domestic servant of the Mission school's head teacher, WT Lawrie; her father was a shearer, away for months at a time. When her mother died in 1944, 12-year-old Dulcie lived with her grandmother and her uncle Bruce (Dulcie does not differentiate paternal from maternal kin). She describes how people worked, and she names and briefly profiles men and women whose hard work she recalls with admiration. She remarks with approval that she was firmly disciplined as a child. Strictness in the household reinforced the government's tight regulation of the community: alcohol consumption and gambling were banned. The Salvation Army began to work in the community in the 1940s.

That the children of Raukkan's white staff were educated elsewhere began to make Dulcie aware of the importance of race. She writes that she has tried throughout her life to adhere to an ideal of multi-racial community, in which all people are treated the same, no matter what their colour or background. Her (and her husband's) personal triumph over other people's prejudices about Aborigines is a thread that runs through her stories.

Dulcie left school in 1947 (when she was 15) to be a domestic servant in the household of the Mission's dairy overseer. Later she mentions going grape-picking. She tells very little of her experience of employment over the ten years that elapsed between leaving school and leaving the Mission. Nor does she say why she and Lindsay Wilson (a Raukkan resident whom she had married in 1950) decided to leave Raukkan — where she felt 'very safe and secure' — other than to insist that it was a chosen, not a coerced, move.²⁴ Lindsay is more forthcoming.

We moved to Millicent when there was a push to move us out, to assimilate amongst the white people. I didn't mind moving away from the Mission, because ... the wages weren't flash at Point McLeay and work was hard to come by. Dulcie and I could not see at that particular time that things were going to improve.²⁵

He recalls that they resisted the Department of Aboriginal Affairs' suggestions about where he, Dulcie and their three children might settle. They preferred Millicent because the Salvation Army was active there. Their move from Raukkan thus seems to have combined personal choice, labour market inducement and State government and Salvation Army encouragement to assimilate into the white community. Characteristically, Dulcie's first story about settling in Millicent illustrates how diligently she kept track of her rental payments.

Assimilation was an opportunity for Dulcie, and she grasped it eagerly. She is proud that she has never allowed the narrated incidents of white prejudice to undermine her belief in her own place in the Australian community. She sees no limits to the

23. Wilson 1998: 19.

24. Wilson 1998: 58.

25. Wilson 1998: 104.

Aboriginal potential to 'progress' and to 'raise their standard of living', though she acknowledges that 'in some areas' 'the humpy and handout mentality' continues.²⁶ The Salvation Army rewarded her upward striving in 1957 not only by encouraging her family's move to Millicent but also by inviting her to attend in London a World Conference of the Salvation Army for Women. To deliver a ten minute speech to several thousand people in Westminster Hall was 'an experience I'll never forget' and the beginning of a lifetime of 'talking' as an active member of the Salvation Army, specialising in the 'Womens' Fellowship'.²⁷

Assimilation did not mean that Dulcie and Lindsay turned their backs completely on Raukkan folk nor on their Aboriginal heritage. They gave their children holidays with her Uncle Bruce and Cousin Oky on Yalkuri Station (near Raukkan) and at the Coorong. However, Dulcie does not mention contact with her father other than briefly noting his death. Her husband Lindsay maintained a specific link with the Ngarrindjeri past. At the request of the Australian and the South Australian Museum, Lindsay applied himself to Aboriginal crafts in which he had been instructed by Ngarrindjeri elders in his boyhood. He made occasional use of the Ngarrindjeri language, and he served on a Heritage Committee whose concerns included maintaining an Aboriginal burial ground. Doctoral students in archaeology and anthropology interviewed Dulcie and Lindsay to gather data on Ngarrindjeri culture.

When Dulcie resumes the story, in 'Today's bridges', she thus presents herself confidently as a bearer of Ngarrindjeri heritage, qualified to criticise others' representations of that heritage. Before the Hindmarsh Island controversy, she reports, she and Lindsay had become aware that Lindsay's account of Ngarrindjeri history was not consistent with what some 'younger Aborigines' were saying. The representations to which she objects are not discrete facts of history and folklore. Rather Dulcie is at odds with the whole thrust of historiography and social policy since the early 1970s that treats Aborigines as having a special grievance. 'Much has been said about Aboriginal people being disadvantaged, and dispossessed of their land and heritage since colonisation. I agree that this did happen, during the early settlement and right through to the 1950s'.²⁸ She implies that the 1950s were a turning point, a termination of maltreatment and the start of something better. Having experienced the benefits of assimilation, she is uneasy about the land rights policies and the special programs of Aboriginal support that followed. As she sees it, an alliance formed between certain Whites and certain Blacks to foster a sense of aggrieved racial separatism among Aborigines — 'the notion that this is their land, that white Australians are intruders'.²⁹ She is amused, she says, 'to hear some of the Aborigines wanting more land, for I have seen first hand many acres of their land not being used'.³⁰ She thinks that when the State assists Aborigines on low income — to buy a home, for example — it is 'an act of gross discrimination against those Aboriginal people who are trying to rise above the generalised perception of Aborigines by helping themselves'.³¹ Why should those who have 'lazed about with

26. Wilson 1998: 69.

27. Wilson 1998: 75.

28. Wilson 1998: 162.

29. Wilson 1998: 135.

30. Wilson 1998: 44.

the hand-out mentality' find it easier to get assistance, she wonders.³² In Dulcie's view, a spuriously aggrieved perspective on the past has encouraged some Aborigines and their allies in governments and church organisations to uphold social policies that were unfair to the Aborigines, such as herself, who had thrived by embracing assimilation.

Her experience of ATSIC (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) in the early 1990s deepened her fear that this new orthodoxy was becoming institutionally powerful. 'During ATSIC meetings, some of the councillors who had never been employed by Aboriginal organisations, myself included, were made to feel that they knew nothing about Aboriginal issues.'³³ From her increasingly critical perspective, and not because of any opinion about the proposed Hindmarsh Island bridge (about which she claims disinterest), the Ngarrindjeri assertion that Hindmarsh Island is a sacred women's site struck her as outrageous nonsense, the last straw, a provocation to the Ngarrindjeri 'silent majority' to speak out.³⁴ Dulcie narrates her dissidence as a test of her character, a Christ-like ordeal: 'Why am I subjecting myself to all this trauma?'³⁵ To involve herself in public controversy was to suffer for a noble cause.³⁶ She denounces several Ngarrindjeri people by name, and she says that she feels betrayed by one of the archaeologists who had interviewed Lindsay and herself. She is appalled that ATSIC and the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement resourced the 'misrepresentation'. She rejoices in the findings of the 1995 Stevens Royal Commission that the 'women's business' was a fabrication, and she concludes her life story by evoking the giddy pleasure of dining with her champions from the Howard Cabinet.

Doris Kartinyeri

Doris Kartinyeri, as she tells in *Kicking the tin*, has long suffered a mental illness known as bipolar affective disorder (or manic depression). She does not tell us how old she was when she received this diagnosis, though she says that her first acute episode of the illness took place in 1984, when she was 39. She appears to have written the book in her early fifties (that is, in the late 1990s). She devotes more than the last third of her book to describing her episodic manias and depressions and the admissions to hospital and treatments that they occasioned, and one of the conceptions of her self that unifies her narrative is that of a sufferer who has battled to control her illness. She is a damaged 'self', in recovery. In one of her final paragraphs she accounts for her sickness by referring to the things that had been done to her earlier in her life by cruel, exploitive and irresponsible authority: 'I believe that my illness resulted from the combination of deception and despair throughout my life. I believe that I am only now coming to terms with all that I endured in the past.'³⁷ Her illness, or at least her medicated management of it, is thus a source not only of suffering but also of knowledge about what, in her view, caused her illness. To write a book reviewing her life in these terms has helped

31. Wilson 1998: 64.

32. Wilson 1998: 65.

33. Wilson 1998: 168.

34. Wilson 1998: 150.

35. Wilson 1998: 153.

36. Wilson 1998: 173.

37. Kartinyeri 2000: 135.

her to be 'healed of all my anguish and disillusion'.³⁸ 'My healing began when I decided to write an autobiography'.³⁹

What happened to Doris?

Doris Kartinyeri was an inmate of Colebrook, an institution for Aboriginal children started in 1924 by the United Aborigines' Mission. In the late 1990s, the third site of Colebrook Home, the Training Centre at Eden Hills (opened in 1943, closed in 1972) became a place of collective remembrance for many of South Australia's Aboriginal families, who attended ceremonies there that unveiled statues and plaques. Doris's contribution to the lore of Colebrook begins by her writing that she lived the first 14 years of her life there (at Eden Hills), without ever being told that her mother had died shortly after her birth and that she had been removed from her family even though they had been willing to look after her. The family story, obtained recently from her sister Doreen, is that their father mistakenly signed Doris into Colebrook; he thought he was signing a form to receive Child Endowment payments, and he was unable to persuade the South Australian government to let him have her back.

Nonetheless, there was affection at Colebrook — among the children and between the children and some of the staff. 'We were happy in our own way, laughing, crying, and just being an extended family with a lot of love ... I felt secure with my many brothers and sisters.'⁴⁰ For the first seven of Doris's 14 Colebrook years, she was under the care of Sisters Hyde and Rutter — 'two wonderful women' whose presence gave Doris 'a sense of security, belonging and love that I was unable to receive from my true family'.⁴¹ The recalled incidents of her childhood at Colebrook are at first happy, unremarkable stories of play; the children enjoyed adequate food from the kitchen and they gathered 'bush tucker' from the land surrounding the Training Centre. 'I am amazed at our natural instinct for bush food. We had our heritage taken from us but we still had the natural instinct for finding the right foods.'⁴² As Doris recalls her experience, Colebrook was an emotionally complete world. From time to time, Doris's father, brothers and sisters visited her, but Doris recalls these as uneasy occasions. Her father did not mention her mother's death, and Doris recalls finding it difficult to address him as 'Dad'; and she also remembers telling her sister that, really, her only brothers and sisters were the other Colebrook children.⁴³

Colebrook children lost their security after the departure of Hyde and Rutter in 1952 — Doris calls this chapter 'the beginning of grief' — for the succeeding staff were more strict and more religious. Wetting the bed was, to them, an offence to be punished. Doris believes that the masters and mistresses of the new regime 'have a lot to answer for. The strictness affected many of our brothers and sisters. This is one of the reasons I believe a majority of our sisters and brothers went to either gaol or mental institutions. Others suffered with alcoholism. All in the name of Religion!'⁴⁴ This strict

³⁸. Kartinyeri 2000: 112.

³⁹. Kartinyeri 2000: 1.

⁴⁰. Kartinyeri 2000: 14.

⁴¹. Kartinyeri 2000: 16–17.

⁴². Kartinyeri 2000: 26.

⁴³. Kartinyeri 2000: 47.

⁴⁴. Kartinyeri 2000: 43.

regime was sometimes the cover for sexual predation by Colebrook staff. This is how she introduces a series of disturbing encounters with a woman staff member: 'As an individual child with no family there to protect me, and being black, naive and vulnerable, I was easy prey for the sexual predators. Colebrook seemed to be a haven for sexual deviants. It was a terrible place to live for a lot of the children.'⁴⁵

After leaving Colebrook — not her decision — at 14, Doris was assigned to a series of white families around Adelaide while completing her education. She later acknowledges that when she first left Colebrook 'I hadn't realised that there was a large family circle to meet.'⁴⁶ The imposed substitute for her family circle proved to be utterly inadequate in that one of her assigned carers was sexually exploitive. Doris writes that as an Aboriginal girl under the 'protection' of Church and State, she lacked effective protection from the greatest threat of all, the sexual pervert disguised as a man of God. Without the security of Colebrook, the importance of being part of a family began to be borne in on her. 'My family was out there but I had no indication where they were. Were they searching for me? I needed to find out who my family was because I wanted them so desperately.'⁴⁷ Yet she 'did not know how to approach them as a member of a family should', and her first employer, a Methodist nursing home, advised her not to contact her family.⁴⁸ Doris implies that she was influenced by such advice. Not yet 16 years old, under the pressure of this emotional isolation and sexual vulnerability, she lost her 'dignity, self respect and, most importantly, my identity and sanity'.⁴⁹ When her sister Connie visited, Doris 'was just numb for the words to tell'.⁵⁰ She recalls herself as then lacking a self: 'I just did not have any goals in life, nor dreams, nor direction. I was just drifting.'⁵¹

Doris's account of her two relationships with men — the second a marriage — and of the birth of three children is startlingly brief. Doris continued to search for 'her people' and for the security that men could not give her.⁵² Adelaide's Carrington Hotel was an informal meeting place for the region's Aboriginal people, though the combination of alcohol, Aborigines and police could make trouble. By frequenting the Carrington, Doris was able to meet 'a large number of my aunts uncles and cousins' which 'gave me a sense of belonging'.⁵³ One of them persuaded her to move to Raukkan, the place of her birth and, as she was learning, part of the homeland of her people, the Ngarrindjeri. She recalls that it was difficult to find acceptance among the Ngarrindjeri at Raukkan, and so she moved to the nearby town of Murray Bridge.⁵⁴ As her contact with the Ngarrindjeri continued, she found 'aunties, uncles, cousins, all over the place. It was very difficult to know them all.'⁵⁵ She found the language difficult.

45. Kartinyeri 2000: 54.

46. Kartinyeri 2000: 73.

47. Kartinyeri 2000: 62.

48. Kartinyeri 2000: 65.

49. Kartinyeri 2000: 62–3.

50. Kartinyeri 2000: 63.

51. Kartinyeri 2000: 66.

52. Kartinyeri 2000: 71.

53. Kartinyeri 2000: 73.

54. Kartinyeri 2000: 76.

55. Kartinyeri 2000: 78.

It is a striking feature of Doris's account of her early adulthood, back in Ngarrindjeri country, up until the commencement of her mental illness, that she recalls rejection not by whites but by the Aborigines whom she sought as her kin. She found them negative and judgmental: 'the past always seemed to be brought up and they always had the habit of putting people down'.⁵⁶ Treated as an outsider, she turned to the consolations of alcohol.

Because this is the moment in her life-story when she begins to narrate the onset of mental illness, the reader is sensitive to her recollection that the Ngarrindjeri community was, at first, no haven. On the contrary, among the experiences that made her miserable (and that may have precipitated her illness) we must include not only the sudden withdrawal of Colebrook's nurturing atmosphere, but also the emotional austerity of Colebrook in its stricter moments, and the humiliating sexual impositions by authority figures. We can also get from Doris the story that she was left stranded by the unwillingness or the incapacity of her Ngarrindjeri family to re-absorb an estranged kinswoman. To point this out is not to criticise her family for want of compassion, for Doris mentions a number of approaches by sisters Connie and Doreen; and we should remember that to produce ambivalence (at the very least) about one's Aboriginal kin was one of the objectives of the training to which Doris herself had been subjected.

Doris gives few details about her interactions with her relatives in her twenties and thirties. Indeed, there is a contradiction, suggestive of emotional difficulty — in her brief mentions of her father. Doris writes that she eventually came to understand that he was 'an angry man. I can understand why he was angry.' However, 'as I matured and got to know my natural family, we became *very close and a strong bond developed*'.⁵⁷ However, 34 pages later, recalling the moment when she heard of her father's death, she writes: 'I had no emotions and couldn't cry. The emptiness I felt left me hollow. *I really never got to know my father*'.⁵⁸

At the point in the story when Doris becomes mentally ill, then, she has not found a place within her kin network. However, by the end of the book, 60 pages later, she can report that she has found such a place, and not only because she is now a grandmother. 'It's bloody good that now I can sit with my family and friends and my brothers and sisters around the table, laughing and joking about all the bizarre incidents in my life'.⁵⁹ What made the difference? Two themes run through those 60 pages, and both are about (what I wish to call) 'public reassignments' of Doris Kartinyeri.

She is given the status of a mentally ill person; she reports her daughter Jennadene saying to her that 'insanity is the safest place to be mum'.⁶⁰ And, as the Stolen Generations and Hindmarsh Island issues emerge, she acquires the status of a marginalised, maltreated but articulate Aboriginal person. Both reassignments contribute to the emergence of the author who, at the end of her autobiography, celebrates her belonging to a network of Ngarrindjeri kin.

56. Kartinyeri 2000: 78.

57. Kartinyeri 2000: 43, emphasis added.

58. Kartinyeri 2000: 77, emphasis added.

59. Kartinyeri 2000: 136.

60. Kartinyeri 2000: 101.

In narrating the emergence of this self who can write confidently about her own suffering, Doris tells several stories about her delusional and manic states and about being treated for them. While paying a warm tribute to her psychiatrist, Dr Kenny, she says that she received no support from Aboriginal Health, explaining this neglect as the result of 'ignorance and that people are wary of mental illness'.⁶¹ There were other sources of support, such as the Bellara nursing home, where Doris worked for four years. She tells of her colleagues' tactful handling of one of her manic episodes in that workplace. Rejoicing in her newfound identity as a writer, she thanks her TAFE (College of Technical and Further Education) teachers, Don and Una Stempel, and her tutor Zora, for improving her literacy. Interspersed among these acknowledgments of support and care are fond mentions of her daughter Jennadene and her daughter-in-law Jennifer, and her clear delight in being a grandmother. Reminiscences with other former residents about Colebrook's uglier moments become episodes of healing, in Doris's telling, but they also fuel her anger at the government and the churches, an anger that rises as the book draws to a close. Colebrook, at this point in the book, is evoked with terrible stories about sexual abuse of the boy residents, with long-term damage to the men in her generation.

The movement among the Stolen Generations to have their experiences recognised gave Doris a public platform for such memories. In conference presentations about her life at Colebrook she helped to exemplify the Stolen Generations. Colebrook itself became the site for a series of ambivalent commemorations that she attended with enthusiasm. For the very reason that she was credible as a speaker on Colebrook, however, she had to be marginal to the struggle to preserve women's sacred sites on Hindmarsh Island. Yet she celebrates her solidarity with other Ngarrindjeri who promoted the sacredness of that disputed place.

I wanted to support the Ngarrindjeri women but I couldn't because I didn't know how to. Thanks to the Government, I had my heritage taken away from me when they removed me from my family. I didn't receive the history of my people and had awfully little knowledge about my culture and my heritage. Women's business was never passed down to me but I believed this group of women was fighting for what they believed in. I became a victim full of anger and hopelessness.⁶²

The combined effect of the Stolen Generations and Hindmarsh Island campaigns was a public framework of sympathetic understanding in which Doris's disinheritance could be represented as an attribute of her contemporary Aboriginality. The available Aboriginal identities, in the moment of her book's writing and reception, included the damaged identity of a Ngarrindjeri person who admits that she does not know her Law. Her mental illness is similarly transformed into something positive; it is narrated as her suffering Aboriginality. 'The battles and struggles of living in two worlds that I endured throughout my life have proven my aboriginality.'⁶³ By giving rise to the figure of the abused and suffering Aboriginal subject, the Hindmarsh dispute, the Stolen Generations inquiry and the reconciliation movement have combined to produce

61. Kartinyeri 2000: 100.

62. Kartinyeri 2000: 125.

63. Kartinyeri 2000: 135.

a public culture in which her sick and damaged self can be presented by Doris as the exemplary product of a personal and a national history.

Veronica Brodie

Veronica Brodie's book was not conceived as a response to the way that Ngarrindjeri identity was represented in the Hindmarsh Island struggles. Mary-Anne Gale's introduction tells us that the dispute erupted when the book was being edited in a three-way collaboration between Mary-Anne herself, Brodie and the publisher Wakefield Press. And the book opens with Veronica explaining the contemporary significance of her Kurna, rather than her Ngarrindjeri, heritage (she is descended of both). However, the editing process was sufficiently prolonged to allow her to write two chapters (a little more than ten per cent of the book) on the Hindmarsh matters; they are placed late in the book, so that her life narrative leads up to her involvement in the Hindmarsh affair.

Veronica Rankine was born at Raukkan in 1941. Her recurring presentation of herself is as a person who is able to recommit herself to self-denial. Like Dulcie Wilson, Veronica recalls Raukkan adults' discipline as a beneficial formation of her character, disposing her to listen respectfully to adult authority and to be careful how she posed questions. 'Learning that part of the culture was good, and I appreciate that today — that discipline I got then.'⁶⁴ Nowadays, she reflects, discipline as a way of caring for the young has lapsed.⁶⁵ Evoking the poverty of the Raukkan residents, she recalls the mission's austerity as enabling her to do without; it freed her of the desire for material things that causes other people 'terrible anguish'. 'I'm more interested in my heritage and spirituality and genealogy ... the cultural side of life'.⁶⁶ Later in the book she returns to the theme of 'greed' as the nemesis of Aboriginal culture.⁶⁷ Here it is relevant to mention that Veronica is diabetic, so food itself is a test of fortitude. This colours her account of a formative overseas trip. Her visit to India in 1988 'forced me to evaluate my own life and my own source of food — it made me look at my whole self. After that trip I said, "If I don't have a loaf of bread, or if I miss a meal, I won't grizzle and I won't gripe, because those humble people in India have taught me that." They taught me never to be selfish.'⁶⁸

A theme of Veronica's story is her growing understanding of the ways that her life was shaped by authorities — both the adults in her family and by the state. As an adolescent, Veronica was placed under the caring discipline of sisters Hyde and Rutter, after they had left Colebrook to take charge of Tanderra, a United Aborigines' Mission hostel for Aboriginal high school students. She came to accept the good intentions behind the matrons' close supervision. She and the other girls were being taught how to live in the city. 'They knew what the city had to offer Aboriginal girls, and believe me, it wasn't a lot!'⁶⁹ Before living at Tanderra Veronica had been sent to live in Adelaide with relatives, from time to time, and she later realised that this was to spare her the

⁶⁴. Brodie 2002: 43.

⁶⁵. Brodie 2002: 52.

⁶⁶. Brodie 2002: 25.

⁶⁷. Brodie 2002: 148.

⁶⁸. Brodie 2002: 124.

⁶⁹. Brodie 2002: 60.

violent periods in her parents' relationship. There were other ways that the adults at Raukkan determined her life, but I will come back to them later.

While in Adelaide, she began to understand how law and bureaucratic regulation recognised certain city-dwelling Aboriginal relatives as different, as 'exempt' from the laws that discriminated against Aboriginal people. At one point, her visiting father introduced her to his exempted sister Olga, with whom he had not associated since she left Raukkan at the age of 13. It was at this reunion of brother and sister that Olga's husband learned for the first time that his wife had been born into an Aboriginal family. As an Aboriginal woman 'passing' as 'white', Olga had not mentioned this to her husband. Official regulation of the boundary between legally-defined Aborigines and exempt or 'passing' Aborigines was sometimes reinforced by such self-regulation of the two classes of people. Veronica's exposure to the Protection Board as an adolescent and as an adult allowed her to sympathise with people's investment in these differences of status: 'you can understand why older people who could pass off as white did take the opportunity'.⁷⁰ This was the stratified and regulated world of city and rural South Australia in the 1950s, the world that the Tanderra matrons were teaching Veronica and her classmates how to deal with. As Veronica gratefully recalls: 'they showed us how to fight back without anger, because they knew what the Protection Board was like'.⁷¹

Veronica was not given the option of going beyond the Intermediate Certificate (Year Nine) at Unley Girls Technical High School 'because if you got too educated you might cotton on to what they were up to', as Veronica explains.⁷² Possibly, this is her retrospective comment on the system; she also states her gratitude to the Tanderra matrons, Rutter and Hyde: 'They were a real caring sort of couple' who supported her decision to train as a nurse.⁷³

In the middle sections of her book, Veronica recounts a series of clashes with the officers of the Protection Board, with the Board trying to tell her for whom she should work, when she left nursing, and where she should live. As she recalls, 'exemption' could be a threat as well as a rewarding recognition of an Aboriginal person's efforts to uplift herself. If the Protection Board punished her recalcitrance by exempting her, 'I would be excluded from my home for the rest of my life' — that is, she would be forbidden to associate with Aboriginal reserve residents who had not been exempted.⁷⁴ Indeed, the Board demonstrated that it could inflict this punishment simply by refusing her permission to visit Raukkan. She endured three such refusals before she complained to a Member of Parliament, who spoke to the Protection Board officials on her behalf. Veronica was not legally exempt until she married an exempt Aborigine, Jim Brodie. 'Jim never spoke much about his family. They were funny. They knew they were Aborigines, but to admit it was another thing.'⁷⁵ Jim and Veronica did not allow

70. Brodie 2002: 88.

71. Brodie 2002: 61.

72. Brodie 2002: 63.

73. Brodie 2002: 69.

74. Brodie 2002: 74. South Australia's *Aborigines Act* 1934 had introduced the possibility of 'exemption'. In 1953 the *Police Offences Act* included a Section making it an offence for non-Aboriginal people habitually to 'consort' with Aborigines 'without reasonable excuse'. An exempted person would thus be at risk of prosecution if he/she associated with an Aboriginal friend or relative who was not also exempted. This Section was repealed in 1958.

their status to prevent their receiving non-exempt Ngarrinjeri relatives into their home. Veronica concurs with Dulcie Wilson in recalling the late 1950s and early 1960s as a time when Raukkan residents were becoming fed up with the mission's limited opportunities and were seeking other places to live, including Adelaide where exempt relatives resided.⁷⁶

Veronica's experience of exemption was short-lived, for legislative reform in the mid 1960s was dismantling the framework of Protection Board control and thus dissolving the statutory distinction between Aborigines and others. She writes that she experienced this moment of Aboriginal emancipation as the government giving her permission to be Aboriginal once more. She reflects that had she lived a long time as 'exempt' she might have lost her sense of being Aboriginal.⁷⁷ One of her ways to hang on to her sense of being Aboriginal was to refuse one of the fruits of policy reform, the right to vote.⁷⁸

Veronica's narrative of the late 1960s to late 1970s (her late twenties and thirties) is very brief; she mentions a few jobs, the departure of her husband, her alcohol problem and her recovery from it. This sets the scene for what she calls 'my spiritual awakening' in 1979 (when she was 38). One source of this awakening was her older sister, Leila Rankine. Leila had lived much longer at Raukkan than Veronica before moving to Adelaide and becoming a key figure in Adelaide University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music. When Veronica's rehabilitation under the regimen of Alcoholics Anonymous climaxed in a 'spiritual awakening' — an overnight event confirmed to her by her psychotherapist — Leila became a close supporter of her continuing recovery. Having told us that, Veronica does not make Leila a large character in the next few chapters — dealing with her work in alcoholics' rehabilitation institutions, with her visit to India in 1988 and with her work for the Aboriginal Housing Board — until Leila's death in January 1993. It is Leila's death that brings Veronica's narrative to the 'Hindmarsh Island Bridge Affair'.

Just before dying of a long illness, Leila told Veronica the secret women's law of Kumarangk. Veronica explains to the reader why she had not previously been told. Her mother had judged Leila to be the more responsible daughter, closer to the culture. As Veronica explains, making sense of it now: 'Mum knew I was drinking and carrying on

75. Brodie 2002: 88.

76. Brodie 2002: 97.

77. Brodie 2002: 100.

78. The *Aboriginal Affairs Act* 1962 repealed the *Aborigines Act* 1934 while continuing some of its 'protective' powers. It was no longer possible to force an Aboriginal person to live on a reserve. The term 'half-castes' was no longer used, but those not of 'full blood' were still considered to be of 'Aboriginal blood' if they were not specifically exempted. Those exempted had their names removed from the Register of Aborigines. If you were removed from the Register then the *Aboriginal Affairs Act* did not apply to you. A 1962 Commonwealth law made it possible for all Aborigines to vote in Commonwealth elections whether or not their own State enfranchised them. In 1966 South Australia's *Prohibition of Discrimination Act* made it illegal to refuse to serve, accommodate and admit to any place 'by reason of that person's race or country of origin, or the colour of his skin'. In 1967 Aborigines obtained by legislative amendment the same rights to drink as others in South Australia (and Executive action had effected this in 1965). In 1968 South Australia abolished its Register of Aborigines.

like I was, and she thought I certainly wasn't a good person to tell any of the sacred cultural stuff to.⁷⁹ The reader could connect this explanation to a passage 90 pages earlier in which she recalled the fears of Raukkan's senior people when she was a child. They had given only minimal answers to children's questions about Ngarrindjeri language and culture because they knew that 'whiteman would come in one day and take the language, and learn more about the ways, and so nothing would be safe any more.'⁸⁰ As Veronica tells, she has inferred (back then or more recently? It is not possible to know) that in the late 1940s and early 1950s the older Ngarrindjeri did not trust the younger ones to keep Ngarrindjeri knowledge safe from 'whiteman' appropriation. Now, in the early 1990s, her sister was revealing that she had been entrusted with something important and was prepared, on her deathbed, to entrust that knowledge to Veronica.

She saw that I had been so many years off the drink, and I was capable of being told the women's business. So she told me, and I was quite amazed — I was quite shocked. It really opened my eyes. I didn't know any culture like that existed for our Ngarrindjeri women, but it does!⁸¹

Veronica then immediately considers how that knowledge affects her own responsibilities.

If only our younger Ngarrindjeri women could learn of it, it might help them — it might do something for them. It won't, however, unless they're prepared to give up some of their present life, and the way they're living life today. I believe you've got to combine Aboriginal culture with what you're doing — you've got to have strength to draw on that Aboriginal culture. But while you're living the wild way and doing all these foolish things, you're certainly not going to be able to give to your culture. So you have to make a decision.⁸²

After Leila's death, Veronica explains to Leila's children that she will not tell them what their mother told her because their lifestyle showed them to be 'blabbermouth'. They would be told, when older people judged them worthy to receive.⁸³

This is not the first passage in which Veronica has reflected on the moral gap between herself and the young. Earlier in the book, her account of the Protection Board includes the following ambivalent reflection on the way the Board's invigilation had been a harsh test.

Our young ones today — we hear them say how hard life is for them. But I often wonder, if younger people had had our lives to live, what would they do? I could not imagine it. I could never, ever imagine them living the kind of life that we did under the Protection Board system. They'd never survive, because they wouldn't know how to. It was very difficult, you know. It's no wonder that it sent some of us to the drink!⁸⁴

79. Brodie 2002: 145.

80. Brodie 2002: 53.

81. Brodie 2002: 146.

82. Brodie 2002: 146.

83. Brodie 2002: 146.

84. Brodie 2002: 112.

One good legacy of the trying and insulting Hindmarsh Island Bridge Affair, for Veronica, is that her own daughters 'have come out now and are badgering me and saying, "Mum, we want to know more"'.⁸⁵ She now feels herself to be part of a cultural system that links knowledge with virtue.

Because that's how things are handed down. Not, as some people might think, automatically from generation to generation. It's handed down in such a way that a mother or an elder judges whether a particular person is wise enough and ready for responsibility.⁸⁶

We could say that one of the benefits of the bruising Hindmarsh ordeal is that it renewed and amplified Veronica's moral authority over her children.

Varieties of Ngarrindjeri virtue

It was the practice of governments to constitute Indigenous Australians as certain categories of person: by age, by sex, by descent, by colour, and by intensity of government supervision. Reading these three Ngarrindjeri autobiographies gives us the opportunity to understand how these distinctions could become powerful in people's lives. It is part of their effect that they produced more than one way to be situated in relation to Ngarrindjeri heritage. Doris Kartinyeri, by her own account, was effectively blocked from that heritage; however, her dispossession validates her, now, as exemplifying a certain Ngarrindjeri experience. Veronica Brodie and Dulcie Wilson narrate themselves as receivers of Ngarrindjeri heritage, though in different ways. Through her sister, and to her own admitted surprise, Veronica had access to Law that her mother's generation had decided not to pass on to her. Evidently, no-one passed such knowledge on to Dulcie, but she was sufficiently confident of the completeness of her understanding of Ngarrindjeri law that she did not find it credible that members of her own generation could know things withheld from her.⁸⁷

The autobiographies of Veronica and Dulcie show them to be alike in their sense of being women who have been tested. Dulcie evokes her own goodness in terms of her good works, her prayer and her courageous dissent from powerful, public accounts of Aboriginality that she finds repugnant. She stands up bravely for the truth of her understanding of her Ngarrindjeri heritage. Veronica presents herself as a woman who clung to Aboriginality in the face of the temptations of 'passing', who shook off the grip of alcoholism and who distances herself from the pleasures of a materially self-indulgent, 'greedy' society — influences to which many other Aborigines succumb. Her success against these distractions and corruptions is rewarded, to her surprise and pleasure, by her sister's recognition of her as worthy to carry a knowledge the possession of which is the mark of a distinctly Aboriginal virtue. She now is a judge of others' fitness to receive that heritage.

⁸⁵. Brodie 2002: 183.

⁸⁶. Brodie 2002: 183.

⁸⁷. One difference between the 1995 Stevens Royal Commission and the 2001 von Doussa review of its findings is that when Stevens questioned the dissident women, their proclamation that they knew nothing of the 'secret women's law' was taken as strengthening the argument that there was no such thing; in the proceedings under von Doussa, the dissident women's 'lack of knowledge of secret women's business proved little or nothing' (Simon 2003: 446).

Are the dissident Ngarrindjeri women of Veronica's generation like those youngsters raised by Veronica and Leila — wayward, but redeemable? On this question Veronica is clearly uncomfortable and ambivalent. On the one hand, she would like to sit down with women such as Dulcie, hear them out, and explain to them that they have allowed themselves to be manipulated by greedy whites.⁸⁸ On the other hand, 'They should be ashamed to call themselves Ngarrindjeri, they are from Raukkan. So it's no wonder they weren't told any secrets about it. The old women were very careful about who they told their secrets to.'⁸⁹ Her closing words are conciliatory. 'I must say that I still love the dissident women, as I love all Ngarrindjeri women, despite what happened.'⁹⁰

Different as they may be in their ways of being Ngarrindjeri, these three women can all partake of that wider autobiographical idea, the suffering Aborigine who survives to narrate the story of their suffering. And each of them can present her suffering in reference to some public account of what it is to be Aboriginal. Doris finds her Aboriginal voice by making her story an exemplar of the Stolen Generations. She can plausibly trace her mental illness to the version of that story which emphasises its elements of child abuse, even while acknowledging that there was much in the Colebrook experience that was warm and good. Veronica, the recovering alcoholic, plausibly accounts for her abuse of alcohol by reminding us about what was shaming in the government's policy of selective exemption. As someone who thrived on assimilation, Dulcie's suffering, and her triumph over it, came much later. She was not a Stolen Child; she flourished as an assimilating Aborigine. It is the post-assimilationist public account of Aboriginality that she finds oppressive: the idea that her people had so much taken from them and are now owed so much. As she sees things, people who have not uplifted themselves are now rewarded with handouts. Perhaps the most repugnant feature of contemporary public Aboriginality for Dulcie — though this is not explicit in her book — is that there are now other traditions of virtue than those which honour her as a steadfast soldier in Christ's army. When the keepers of the secrets of Kumarangk explain why they know something that the dissident women such as Dulcie don't know, they invoke not only an inheritance of knowledge, but also a continuing practice of judgment about who is virtuous enough to bear the cross of being Aboriginal in contemporary Australia.

So, who has the authority to speak for the Ngarrindjeri? No one person or entity, it seems. 'Our Ngarrindjeri nation was a proud nation once', writes Veronica.⁹¹ Is univocal history a condition of the recovery of that 'national' pride? When Aboriginal people write history by writing autobiographies, are they not likely to undermine the presumption of a common Ngarrindjeri heritage, and therefore perhaps undermine the 'Ngarrindjeri nation'? An Indigenous historiography that is largely autobiographical is a relatively poor basis for a sense of 'nation' as common heritage; the generic emphasis on 'individuality' is the antithesis of the homogenising tendency of a 'national' historiography that makes 'culture' the test of nationhood.

88. Brodie 2002: 148.

89. Brodie 2002: 157–8.

90. Brodie 2002: 188.

91. Brodie 2002: 148.

Collectivities such as 'Ngarrindjeri' are imaginative constructs, and so are all nations. However, some of these imaginative constructs deploy material processes that effect boundaries and processes of representation. Within Australia's processes of representation, we now have a space called 'heritage'. Those who use this space to proclaim a 'heritage' may find themselves under inspection in their representation of it. By articulating it, they have ensured that it is no longer simply their own to reproduce. My intention in discussing these three Ngarrindjeri autobiographies is to understand the biographical roots of publicly competing representations of the Ngarrindjeri heritage. We can see, I hope, why Justice Matthews came to the conclusion that both sides were sincere in their competing claims about that heritage; they were true to their lived experience of being Ngarrindjeri. However, the three books also allow us to empathise with the shock that each author experienced in finding that heritage made public is contestable. When 'Ngarrindjeri' heritage became open to diverse invocations, the state intervened using its powers over the representational space 'heritage'. It is a feature of the contemporary Indigenous Australian scene that when rival protagonists of the Indigenous heritage seek authoritative closure, they may turn to external adjudicators. Heritage made public is not only theirs to manage. That the Indigenous polity is nested within the over-arching non-Indigenous political and legal system is not necessarily a disabling feature of Indigenous politics: the colonial state solicits Aboriginality and stimulates rivalries among those bearing that heritage, while at the same time providing the means of resolution between those contending 'Aboriginalities'. That the result leaves some people unhappy and dissatisfied should surprise no-one who has a realistic view of empowerment. The benefit of this sometimes bruising process, however, is its stimulus to Aboriginal people's history-making, as my study attempts to show. The Hindmarsh Island controversy gave each author reason (perhaps additional reason) to become autobiographical.

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Reviews

***Our Community* exhibition, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 30 June to 30 November 2005**

Walgett came to national attention rather inauspiciously during the 1965 Freedom Rides. Sydney University students stopped at Walgett, a town with a reputation for racial discrimination and a growing Aboriginal population, on their tour of north-western NSW, in order to draw to public attention the racism that was so deeply-ingrained throughout this part of Australia. They picketed the Walgett RSL Club, protesting the policy that disallowed Aboriginal ex-servicemen from becoming members. The students were warmly welcomed by local Aborigines, but received a hostile response from white residents, so hostile that they were effectively run out of town late at night, and in an apparent attempt to ensure they would not return, their bus was run off the road by a truck.

In the intervening 40 years, Walgett has retained something of a reputation as a place troubled by deep racial disharmony. It is a sticking point with residents that the only media focus Walgett receives is of sporadic events that reinforce this image. This representational history served as an unarticulated yet nevertheless very present backdrop to *Our Community*, an exhibition staged at the National Museum of Australia, Canberra, between June and November 2005. In a photographic display, a film and oral history audio recording, *Our Community* revealed a very different Walgett to that encountered by the Freedom Riders. Presented here was the Walgett of the reconciliation era, an intimate portrait of Walgett as seen through the eyes of black and white residents of the town and its surrounding area.

The exhibition is primarily a celebration of Walgett's diversity, through the eyes of non-Indigenous photographers Ron Blake, Juno Gemes, and Sharon Aldrick. It was first conceived as part of a wider project launched by Aboriginal film-maker and academic Frances Peters-Little in 1998 during a research fellowship she held at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra. Peters-Little grew up in Walgett, which is her mother's customary country. She was interested to interrogate the complex and contradictory nature of community as it is experienced by residents of Walgett, and at one stage envisaged producing a CD-Rom exploring this theme. The photographic works which appeared in the exhibition were commissioned with this wider project in mind.

Peters-Little asked the photographers to 'explore the distinctive cultural and social diversities of those communities existing within the Walgett Shire'. Their different yet complementary perspectives work well together. All work with black and white film and a highly empathetic eye for the subject matter. Ron Blake was most affected by the relationships between people and country; his photographs capture the texture of

the natural environment and portray interactions between people and the land that lies beyond the town's perimeter. Sharon Aldrick spent several months living in Walgett, developing close relationships with the town's Aboriginal residents that enabled her to take a series of informal, compellingly intimate portraits. Juno Gemes accompanied Peters-Little on her 1998 journey through the region, recording photographically the social encounters through which Peters-Little traced her family history.

A 24-minute film, also titled *Our Community*, written and directed by Sean Kennedy and produced by Peters-Little, was commissioned for the exhibition. The film surveys residents of the three main residential areas of the Walgett Shire – Walgett, Lightning Ridge and Sheepyard – recording their thoughts on the nature of belonging. Among others, senior Aboriginal people, the local hairdresser, pool manager, General Practitioner, Court Youth Program Coordinator, publicans, business people, opal miners all speak of their relationship to these places. Across these short interviews striking commonalities and tensions emerge in the way residents convey their perspectives on the places in which they live. These representations can be explored as a series of layers in the discursive construction of belonging. The first layer articulated is similar in style and content to that which might be expected of residents of any rural town – people speak of the clear air, lack of traffic, skies full of stars, no hassles, reliability and generosity of neighbours, the simple joy of having 'absolutely nothing and everything'. A number of interviewees who speak about Walgett at this level give the impression that they are not sure of the purpose of the film. With assertions of this being 'the best place in Australia', and an appeal to 'come and check it out', they may have thought they were appearing in a tourism promotion.

Sitting below this description are a series of diverse perspectives, making it clear that within the Shire of Walgett there exist not one, but rather a number of relatively discrete communities with distinctive experiences and sensibilities. The residents of Sheepyard – a pub surrounded by a small number of miner's dwellings – appear to take comfort in the thoroughly marginalised nature of their existence. Here there is no talk of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interaction, but of individuals who have retreated to this 'last frontier' from all manner of backgrounds, and a series of reflections on the ways in which they pull together during tough times. At Lightning Ridge residents reflect on the multicultural nature of their community and observe it to be a place in which there is 'no judging people'.

Back in Walgett, others reveal, perhaps unwittingly, the complex tensions and contradictions that lie at the heart of the town: 'once you get over what's on the surface and get used to the bars on the windows and start meeting the people, then you'll find something special', observes local councillor Don Lillyman. 'I get emotional when people talk about Walgett, its not as bad as people say it is', says Court Youth Program Coordinator, Lesley Tighe, her voice cracking as she tries to maintain composure. The local hairdresser bemoans the segregation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents.

Through these simple vignettes we glimpse a town with a troubled history, ongoing tensions between elements of the black and white populations, high unemployment, young people who are migrating to the city, and other challenges faced by rural communities everywhere in contemporary Australia. Yet *Our Community* puts a positive face to these challenges, giving a sense that, in a place where life choices are

highly circumscribed, a core group of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents are quietly going about the hard work of producing a viable way of living together. At a time when the reconciliation movement seems to have been emptied of all substance and potential by a lack of political will at a federal level, *Our Community* stands as a potent reminder that substantive work continues locally, and without fanfare, around the country. The film has already picked up an award for Best Documentary Short at the Dreamspeakers International Film Festival in Canada. It screens at SnowyFEST International Film Festival in Thredbo in 2006, and in Canberra during NAIDOC Week 2006 by the Department of Education, Science and Training. It has also been adopted for use in secondary school curricula.

This view of reconciliation in practice (as opposed to practical reconciliation) was reinforced in the presentation made by a delegation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents of Walgett at the *History through a lens* forum held at the Museum to mark the exhibition's opening, on 1 July 2005. In a series of compelling, matter-of-fact accounts they shared with their audience some of the work they are engaged in. There was nothing triumphal in these accounts, although it was clear that the people of Walgett relished the opportunity to speak to a Canberra audience about some of the positive activity occurring in their town.

So, having encountered the Walgett of *Our Community*, what kind of impressions were audiences left with? Firstly, the various dimensions of the exhibition — the film, photographs and Frances Peters-Little's oral history worked together to present a complex human face to a town that has until now been known to outsiders only in superficial and stereotypical terms. The history of colonialism and various stages in governmental approach to Aboriginal people of the Walgett region were revealed. The resilience of Kamilaroi identity in the face of this history, the intercultural collaboration, and the joyous moments in everyday life reflected in the photographs serve as an important counterpoint to the negative mainstream media coverage Walgett's residents are all too familiar with. Yet, importantly, the film ensured that audiences would not leave with a romanticised view of life in Walgett. Bubbling beneath the surface of *Our Community* was a clear sense that while some basic perspectives may be shared, the experience of belonging is complex, contradictory and at times radically different for residents of this place, as it is in any place. The overall impression, however, was uplifting — audiences were left with the message that community is produced at the nexus of historical and contemporary processes, that people can intervene in this process in productive ways, enabling them not only to reinterpret their past constructively, but also to generate tangible hope for the future.

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Along the 'pot-holed track': meditations on mixed inheritance in recent work by Ivan Sen and Dennis McDermott

In Indigenous art and writing, stories of memory, family and tangled black/white identities become familiar; among them, Melissa Lucashenko's and Alexis Wright's uncompromising explorations in fiction, and Kim Scott's great novel *Benang*.¹ Novels are conspicuous, but the issues around black and white entanglement arise in other forms; looking at recent works by the film-maker Ivan Sen and the poet Dennis McDermott, there is a striking convergence. Both of these artists are of mixed Aboriginal and European descent; both avow white as well as black ancestry, and each places the implications of this at the centre of his work.

Ivan Sen's film, *Yellow Fella*,² is a documentary from the production-house CAAMA, the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association. In June 2005 the Sydney Film Festival ran a special tribute to CAAMA, to mark its 25 years in active production. This began as a modest enterprise in Indigenous radio broadcasting for the widespread Aboriginal communities of central Australia. Now, with an impressive base in Alice Springs and established global reach, it has become an important centre of film and television work as well, producing short films in documentary and fictional genres.

Many of CAAMA's documentaries are information films for Indigenous communities; a few more are larger scale for wider circulation, and those are mainly circulated on SBS TV – the Special Broadcasting Service – Australia's multi-ethnic TV channel. Whether intentionally or not, they challenge general thinking on Aboriginal identity and race relations. In particular, they challenge common notions of Aboriginal victimhood. In the present-day liberal-conservative language of our political leaders and others, they might be seen as elements of 'the reconciliation process'.

Some would not agree that anything approaching 'reconciliation' between black and white Australia is actually under way; at least, not if we are thinking of the country's political leadership. In government-speak the term has become a cover for retrogressive policies; in policy terms, 'reconciliation' now seems not only glib but false. The word 'recognition' is more useful, and recognition is what *Yellow Fella* invites.

The film is a journey with Tom Lewis, opening with his memories of his role in the 1978 feature, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*,³ a role he felt to be close to his own life – a young, restless man of mixed descent struggling to find a path between two clashing cultures. But his acting career has no explicit part in this story, which is about seeking out and affirming a difficult double inheritance. Tom is looking for the grave of his white father, the Welsh stockman Hurtle Lewis, with whom in adolescence he spent a few brief periods of time. Tom is filmed at the wheel, talking energetically as he drives across Arnhem Land.

At intervals along the way we get to know his Aboriginal mother, patient in the back seat, laconic, beautiful and dignified, in her sixties. On the property where she went to work as a domestic in her teens, the white man pursued her, with strong

1. Lucashenko 1998; Wright 1997; Scott 1999.

2. Sen 2005.

3. Schepsi 1978.

encouragement from her own relatives; she 'got used to it', she says, but when her child was born, she returned to home country at Roper River. Hurtle Lewis followed her to offer marriage, but she refused him, and kept to her own path. Tom was brought up by her and his Aboriginal stepfather, whom he remembers with love; but he also shows how much it has mattered to him that his natural father cared enough to make that journey. Now, with his mother, his young white wife and their child, he is driving 600 kilometres to the Tennant Creek cemetery, where he believes he may find Hurtle Lewis' grave.

From the passenger seat, the film keeps a close grip on Tom's changing emotions. The actor talks hard about what it means to be both black and white in present-day Australia. He says it's like being in a pinball machine, tossed violently to and fro. He remembers, vividly, the brief times with his natural father. He identifies a bush hill on the changing horizon as a sacred site, and attacks white society for its destructiveness on the land, for its acts of sacrilege. You could get embarrassed as he drives and is driven to make sense of his story — at close quarters, moving in and out of anger, sometimes weeping — we are compelled to sort out responses for which nothing in the standard versions has prepared us.

Later, as the film ends, and he has failed to find his father's grave, he keeps on arguing with fate: 'I'm not black, I'm not white, I'm yellow fella and I'm going to stay that way.' To his two fathers: 'I love them both. God bless them both.' He says he is finding an inner balance; but after the passages of agitation, anger and weeping, we wonder whether he is not working too hard on it, trying to talk his way into feeling what he thinks he ought to feel.

The radical element here may not be immediately apparent. Old stories hang around: memories of Albert Namatjira and Robert Tudawali, stories transmitted as tragedies of irreconcilable conflict when the Aboriginal figure, virtually doomed by his talent, is caught between two worlds. This is not to deny the truth in such stories — Tom Lewis himself, with the pinball machine metaphor, asserts their continuing painfulness. It is rather to suggest that such lives should not be reduced to their victimhood; these people did a lot more than struggle and die. For the purposes of romantic racism, versions of predestined doom are only too convenient; consider *Jedda*⁴ and the questions the film-makers of the 1950s did not ask.

Now, when Indigenous speakers, writers and artists of mixed descent address the majority in Australia, their Aboriginal identification is usually paramount. Listeners and viewers know what political correctness requires; it is — understandably — Aboriginality which must be affirmed and applauded. So when it gets to question time, after a reading or conference paper, nobody asks: 'What are you doing with your white inheritance?' Sometimes the visiting artist is almost hostile in positioning the audience as Other, shackled in white privilege. But sometimes too, on a public platform, a writer or artist may find herself more definitively positioned as Indigenous than she may have wanted, when she has other concerns besides that of Aboriginal identity.

In a remarkable performance as himself in *Yellow Fella*, Tom Lewis makes a break in these disabling circuits. He is both same and other, unlike and like; he is asking for

4. Chauvel 1955.

acknowledgment where both sameness and difference are taken into account. It is in this intimate sense, as well as in all the bigger histories of dispossession, accommodation, marginal reparation, that black and white have been sharing the country for centuries. As the anthropologist Gillian Cowlishaw writes: 'The racial division could be drawn not only down the centre of many marital beds, but also within the bodies of more people than would like to admit it.'⁵

The young director Ivan Sen, like his subject, is of mixed descent. His short films and his feature, the poetic narrative *Beneath Clouds*,⁶ have won many awards, locally and internationally. Some have been disappointed in *Yellow Fella* because, as they see it, the strong poetic element which marked *Beneath Clouds* is absent. It is a straightforward, linear documentary focused on one person; but what should not be missed is that Tom Lewis is living and speaking many more histories than his own.

From the beginning, from the first incursions and collisions, black and white began sharing the country. Indigenous possession, across vast and complex networks of trade, culture and travel, was as overwhelmingly real as it was uncomfortable to those who understood themselves as brave pioneers, whose role was endorsed by unquestioning faith in the invaders' imperial status. Some of the back country massacres were justified by the perpetrators in terms of the need to demonstrate white superiority. The kind of history to which that sort of story belongs is almost too well known, but it shouldn't fade into the wallpaper; the consequences have persisted until now.

The conservative view, perhaps assumed by a majority today, is that yes, some very unpleasant things did happen once, but all that is over; do not keep on plaguing us. For historical reparation, the Howard government's regime has efficiently and painstakingly effected a kind of erasure — we are not thinking of land rights any more, all that was fixed (was it not?), and the Aborigines were put back in their places when, most offensively, they had seemed likely to jump out of them. To make things worse, the Australian Labor Party has no conspicuous role in advancing race relations, which is to say our relations with history.

But elsewhere, in the unofficial politics of dissident public gatherings everywhere, Indigenous representation is beyond politically correct; it is mandatory. For the past decade, the government's politics of denial have worked as provocation. Every major educational institution now engages in Aboriginal studies; not only anthropologists and historians, but also economists, health workers, students of culture and literature and cinema find the boundary areas irresistible. It is only in very recent years that we begin to see the force of a call Umberto Eco made many years ago, for a 'reverse anthropology', for dialectic, for the necessity that observer and observed should change places, and that 'we' — the white majority — begin to understand ourselves as we are seen: the beneficiaries of an invasion.

From there, as the Indigenous poet Dennis McDermott has written, 'Australia is in recovery from a long habit of removing blackfellas from the scene. For the nation, as much as for those dispossessed, taken, sidelined, whitewashed or airbrushed out, recovery is difficult.'

5. Cowlishaw 2004.

6. Sen 2001.

Tom Lewis' resounding announcement of mixed identity comes in that context. His declaration confounds the old stories; he is claiming his whiteness and blackness equally, and he will not put one above the other. The search for the grave is a playing out of a real history in which white and Aboriginal lives have always been intimately entangled. Intentionally or not, he and Sen undermine the romance of black identity, and perhaps risk heresy. But in affirming the closeness of black and white lives through time, they offer a harder challenge.

After the premiere screening of *Yellow Fella* at the film festival there was a friendly, low-key 'Question and Answer' session, with Tom Lewis on stage. Memorably, he moved away from discussion of this particular film to plead to the whole audience, probably a thousand or so at the time, to keep struggling for the life of Australian film-making. He confirmed the inclusiveness of the film when he said 'Please do not let the industry go'; 'This is our campfire,' he said.

It was a potent choice of words; around campfires, people are literally on a level. In his poetry, in academic papers and in essays, Dennis McDermott opens the imaginary circle further. There are links between his work, Ivan Sen's films and Tom Lewis' messages.

McDermott is concerned with what he calls the close 'imbrication' of black and white histories; *imbrication* is a word on which he dwells. He insists on Australia's fundamentally bicultural nature; he wants a history, in general acceptance, which charts the consequences both of dispossession and entanglement. He wants classroom-level histories to encompass the banal, everyday discriminations:

the rental property that vanished when they saw your face, the exclusion from school when a critical mass of parents objected, the forced removals of whole communities as late as the mining-mad sixties ... the plethora of pass-laws, dog-tags and permits to travel, to marry across colour-lines, to scratch yourself.

McDermott's own people were Gadigal, Gamilaroi and Irish; like Sally Morgan and other Indigenous writers, he came late to the knowledge of his Aboriginality. His poem 'Page Three Story' recalls an ironic tale from the mid-1950s. When his darker-skinned older sister won the City of Sydney Eisteddfod for her singing, the *Daily Mirror* headline ran 'First Aborigine wins Eisteddfod'. But then:

The only person apparently not pleased
Was my mother. Didn't they know
The Trinidad connection? Our honourable line
Of West Indian descent? The life-line that
Bound us mix-ups to our parents. My mother called it
Slur, called for an apology, asked for
And got a printed retraction. Page three.
That put them in their place.

McDermott doesn't blame his mother, Dorothy, for thus energetically repudiating her real ethnicity; her extreme anxieties were part of the whole picture, and thus his book of poems is called *Dorothy's Skin*. There was a lot at stake: not just that Aboriginality was downgraded and disreputable, but the kids could have been taken away from her. The siblings were obliged to believe the Caribbean tale until their twenties, then

they worked things out for themselves and took their Aboriginality on board. McDermott now says:

As someone with both Irish grandparents and Aboriginal grandparents, in trying to write unselfconsciously, though not uncritically, about my Aboriginality, questions as to what constitutes *authenticity of voice* are more than academic to me — as is the whole question of personal identity. Defensive identities set hard, deny the reality of ongoing cultural evolution.

There he strikes at the essential centre of contemporary Hansonism.

The acute awareness of loss, the simmering anger and the sense of diminution ... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suffering may be of a different order: longer, harder, sharper ... but we *all* lose, under present arrangements.

Knowingly or not, McDermott is repeating Gough Whitlam's call in 1973, that without coming to terms with Aboriginality and the facts of dispossession, 'all Australians are diminished'. He writes:

Australia needs the Indigenous knowledge, and the frameworks for acquiring and living out that knowledge, that it has always pushed away. If the implied contention holds — that Australia's environmental and economic survival, and the persistence of our humanity, depend on some contemporary manifestation of traditional, respectful relations with 'land' in all its totality: of being 'owned by' the land, rather than owning it — then that becomes a major challenge for Australian writing generally.

And elsewhere, memorably:

This country has a long, pot-holed track, where a road should be, between where we are now and reconciliation with our own history, let alone any real Indigenous and gubba embrace.

In several essays he makes the difficult argument that for Aboriginal poetry to transmit, adequately, Aboriginal trauma, to work as a poetry of witness, it must work first as literature, such that 'one indicator of success may be the extent to which the work "bridges the gap" between a private and a publicly accessible experience'.

He wants Australian writing, from both black and white, to 'get to grips with this bloody barrier — that not only cuts us off from each other, but from the so-slowly won wisdom crucial to living here ... this unique *here*'. And he wants all of our writing 'to break through the denial of systematic separation'. Shifting metaphors, he finds that the denial and all its attendant misunderstandings are huge spaces, like the great areas of darkness in Rover Thomas' paintings. This is how McDermott writes of that artist's way of representing 'the killing times':

Rover paints in reverse:

A massacre's just a skull up a tree.

He makes the sky fall in

on how things are held to be: ground takes shape,

becomes visible; what we thought figure

now looks ground.

... Rover shows no blood, but when I stop

driving, become a passenger, I see. Now, vision seeps

through canvas. I see the earth turning, people

wound to the point of discharge, serpent winds
that dance, like Kali, the desperate's renewal.

So the transformation of Australian self-understanding must not be only for the political and social domains; it is centrally, first and last, a matter of extending imaginations.

A segment of Rover Thomas' painting 'Ngarin Janu Country' appears on the cover of *Dorothy's Skin*. Invoking that great Kimberley painter is like calling up thunder. In 1994 Thomas' work was on large-scale display for the first time in the National Gallery; on a grey Canberra day, his larger works, with black mystery in vast ponds and channels moving through clay and sand, stopped us in our tracks. All you could do was stand and look; there was nothing to say. We had not been warned. There was simply too much there: chasms of complex, alien knowledge, areas of incomprehension; stillness; the great emotional distances between black and white; gaps and rough gullies in a history which still had to be taken as our own.

McDermott has a special freedom. He can call on Rover Thomas, and then range across European literature as well. For his readers in the dominant tribe, he knocks on the door of the Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer. Thinking again of 'systematic separation', McDermott quotes from Tranströmer's poem 'Vermeer':

It hurts to go through walls; it makes you sick
but it's necessary.
The world is one. But walls ...
And the wall is part of yourself.

At that rate, such walls must be demolished first from within. First, but not only. There is always a kind of comfort in affirming the psychic and personal domain; but unless the inward paths lead us back and out, through those classrooms into politics and history, they are sad dead-ends. Virtue is not enough.

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Acknowledgement

This article was developed from a paper given in November 2005 to an Australian studies workshop at the University of Paris at Dauphine. Dennis McDermott has seen the essay in draft and given permission for quotations from his work.

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A sour note on Peter Jackson's *King Kong*

***King Kong*, 2005, directed by Peter Jackson, screenplay by Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens and Peter Jackson, Universal Pictures**

In the sweltering conditions of summer, not long after one of Australia's worst 'race' riots, on Sunday 11 December 2005 (against anyone of 'middle eastern background') at beachside Cronulla in Sydney's south, with that special apocalyptic edge that bushfires etch into consciousness, Peter Jackson's *King Kong* arrived in Australia. Largely in order to escape Canberra's oppressive heat (38 degrees on 1 January 2006), I spent three hours in an air-conditioned cinema watching it. I found the film very disturbing and rather contemptible, particularly in terms of attitudes to 'race' and colonialism. When I got home, I searched the web to see if there was much discussion about the film in these terms, and quickly registered that it was proving quite controversial. In particular, I came across an essay on *Times Online* of 13 December 2005, by Dr Kwame McKenzie, a societal psychiatrist who specialises in causes of mental illness, racism, and social capital.

Dr McKenzie found particularly troubling the way Jackson's film 'feeds into all the colonial hysteria about black hyper-sexuality', an imagery, he points out, with a long history, going back at least to the representation of Othello. The story of the film also, McKenzie felt, 'touches the raw nerve of the Darwin-based association between black men and apes', an association that still has to be endured, he suggests, by 'black footballers when they travel to away games'. The 'same hackneyed stereotypes', he adds, are present in Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, where the 'most fearsome bad-dies were big black and just a bit too Maori looking, the good guys — well white'. He also observes that the film introduces the 'good and dutiful slave stereotype' in the character of the second officer to the ship's captain. McKenzie, seeing the film with his 'transfixed son', said he enjoyed the next two 'fabulous' hours, he liked the way that Jackson had removed the 'lust angle' in the relationship between Kong and Darrow (played by Naomi Watts), and he felt the cinematography was excellent. Nonetheless, he then had to have a complex discussion on negative racial stereotypes with his son. In subsequent email comments, McKenzie's reflections were met with some support but also much abuse and aggressive dismissal.¹

I haven't seen the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. My response to *King Kong*, however, supports Kwame McKenzie's misgivings, though I came out of the cinema with a much lower opinion of the film overall. In aesthetic terms, it lacks visual wit, has long tiresome sequences of animated action where the results are always predictable, including a ridiculous running-with-the-dinosaurs scene. It is uninterested in character, and is saved only by the power of the myth itself, the pathos of impossible romance across species.

Yet, having lived in Washington DC for nine months in 2003/4, a still de facto segregated city, the 'race' implications to all Americans, white and black, are clear. When Kong is displayed in the early 1930s theatre in New York, in chains, listless with despair, the history of slavery, Deep South enjoyment of racial brutality, and Jim Crow laws sanctioned by the whole of white society, are evident now and certainly would have been evident then to the prosperous white audience.

What disturbed Kwame McKenzie and what disturbed me are the surprising scenes involving the 'natives' that the shipload of adventurers encounters on Skull Island. They are surprising because the clumsy references earlier in the film to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* seemed to promise ambiguity and complexity in relation to European colonising.

The movie attempts to lull its audience into thinking this film cannot be racist, after all it has a black officer on board the ship: a strategy endlessly adopted by American TV police shows — have black cop, then construct African-American criminals as bestial as you like. The black ship's officer, after explaining that Conrad's novel has nothing to do with any questioning of colonialism, but, he suggests, is mainly about wishing to find out what's round the next bend of the river, dies not long into the film. His function is over: putting a contemporary avuncular 'good' black man on board both justifies the text as politically beyond question, and shows the benefits when non-whites become 'white', that is, responsible and sensible.

At first one cannot believe the ugliness of the portrayal of the 'natives' on the island. But as soon as one of them refuses chocolate and they become hostile and threatening to the visitors, the usual colonising narrative reversal occurs; the invading explorers are now the victims of barbarism, and any force, especially an enormous array of gleaming guns, is acceptable. The hideous portrait of the islanders, primitive and savage amongst the ruins of a civilization they could neither sustain nor comprehend, offering a female sacrifice to a deity (Kong), ruled by a barbaric witch, owes almost everything, I thought, to the portrait of Gagool in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, a novel so influential in Victorian and later popular fiction that the debt doesn't have to be direct. Gagool is the evil priestess who rules her realm by submissiveness, cruelty, fear, and treachery.²

1. To be precise: in the agitated *Times Online* discussion, which I accessed 1 January 2006, 11 were pro, 36 were contra. Some of those who supported McKenzie also approved of his critical comments on *Lord of the Rings*.

2. I discuss Haggard's novels *King Solomon's Mines* and *She* in section three, *Things Fall Apart of The Nervous Nineties* (Docker 1991).

What is most depressing is that, in an era when racism appears exponentially to be increasing around the world, the film can reproduce a late nineteenth century Victorian literary trope of this kind. It could be said that the film is attempting to reproduce without comment a pre-World War II set of portraits of 'race', but other strands in the film are contemporary in their perspective, particularly the constructing of Naomi Watts' character as feisty and independent. No, innocence is not possible. In reproducing such conventional racist images, the film knowingly promotes rather than questions racial stereotypes and racial hierarchy.

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Book reviews

Kayang and Me by Kim Scott and Hazel Brown, 270pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2005, \$29.95

RENE BAKER FILE #28/E.D.P by Rene Powell and Bernadette Kennedy, 221pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, Western Australia, 2005, \$24.95

Kayang and me and *Rene Baker File #28/E.D.P* are both collaborative works combining individual Indigenous life stories in the form of oral narratives with analysis of the history of contact between European settlers and Indigenous people in Western Australia. Both works are valuable and moving contributions to the archive of Aboriginal first person life histories. Each can also be seen to address some of the difficulties that are raised about the historical status of oral histories, and each could be regarded as projects in 'trauma history' as conceptualised by Bain Attwood in *Telling the truth about Aboriginal history*.¹

Kayang and Me is co-authored by West Australian Indigenous writer Kim Scott, winner of the Miles Franklin and other literary awards, and Hazel Brown, a Noongar elder, born in 1925 at Kendenup. '*Kayang*', meaning female elder, is Brown's honorary title. She names her family as Wilomin people, from '*wilo*', the curlew. *Kayang and Me* interweaves the voices of the two co-authors, each identified by a contrasting typeface, comparable to the dialogic form developed by Jackie Huggins in *Auntie Rita*.² Kim Scott as both secondary voice and primary author is the 'Me' of the title. Scott explores complex questions about Indigenous identity for individuals of Aboriginal descent like himself who are 'relatively disconnected, dispossessed and assimilated', without experience of many aspects of disadvantage associated with being Aboriginal, and knowing little about their Aboriginal antecedents. Like the curlew, he writes: 'we become visible only when our eyes are opened to history'.

Rene Baker File #28/E.D.P is the story of Rene Powell of the Ngaanyatjarra people, born Rene Baker at Warburton Ranges in 1948. The co-authors met in 1978 at an East Perth refuge for homeless women where Bernadette Kennedy, a nun at that time, was working and Rene Baker was a resident. On the basis of their continuing friendship Powell persuaded an initially reluctant Kennedy to co-author this book.

Scott affirms the centrality of his unfolding relationship with Hazel Brown to his sense of self as Aboriginal and also as a writer: 'With Auntie Hazel I stood on the sandy shore of my indigenous heritage, and sensed something substantial and sustaining

1. Attwood 2005: 177-180.

2. Huggins, J and R 1994.

waiting for me to grasp, and yet the only means I had to do so was this laying out of words upon the page.' This cross-cultural paradox, explored in Adam Shoemaker's study of Aboriginal writing, *Black Words White Page*, is also conveyed by Hazel Brown's story of her forebears who adopted European systems to transmit their own cultural communications, sending 'Message sticks in stamped envelopes'.³

Scott's quest for identity involves extended listening to Hazel Brown's stories, supplemented by his own research, whereas few oral narratives are available to Powell: her search requires painstaking archival research into bureaucratic records, a task she delegates mainly to Kennedy. The circumstances of Powell's birth are complex. As the elder of twins, she was permitted to survive according to traditional Aboriginal law, whereas her brother should not have been. Rather than put him to death, the Aboriginal midwives decided to hand the younger twin over to the Warburton Ranges Mission. Later Powell's own file in the white bureaucracy was falsely annotated 'unwanted at birth', overriding the facts of the care she received within her family in her first four years until forcibly removed by white authorities. However, the statement was essentially true for her brother Ernest, who died without knowing the full story of his origins.

Kennedy's account of her persistent and probing investigation into the invasive bureaucratic procedures that so drastically impacted on Powell's life confirms the trust that Powell places in their collaboration. Kennedy not only narrates a record of bureaucratic inhumanity but also examines the relevant laws and questions the legality of what occurred even by the standards of the time. Kennedy also provides a brief outline of her own life story and Anglo-Celtic antecedents in the interests of transparency.

Hazel Brown's and Rene Powell's stories corroborate many aspects of Indigenous/white contact recorded in other Aboriginal life stories. Brown was born in an old packing shed; Powell and her twin brother were born in the bush 'near the airstrip', as Aboriginal women were not then permitted to give birth in white hospitals. Consistent with the persistence of Indigenous maternal genealogies, Brown knows the name of her mother, Nellie Limestone, and where she was from, and likewise her maternal grandmother, Mary Williams. She records the name of her Aboriginal father, Freddy Yiller (Roberts) but does not know the name of her grandfather, 'supposed to have been a white man'. Powell considers it irrelevant that her unknown father was white as she was fully accepted by her mother's Aboriginal husband.

Brown identifies her mother as one of the Stolen Generations, sent to the 'Carrolup Native Settlement' near Katanning. Her account of institutionalised neglect and abuse in her mother's early life concludes with the chillingly familiar words 'she never ever saw her mother again'. The identity-effacing operations of the settlement's management include coercing her mother to marry and also to change her name from Nellie to Sybil 'because there were too many Nellies around'.

The neglect experienced by Rene Powell as a mission child of the next generation proved to be life-threatening. She was removed from her mother in Warburton at four years old and placed some 500 kilometres away in Mount Margaret Mission. While resident there she suffered serious burns when her clothing caught fire: despite being close to death, and then scarred for life, at no point was her mother contacted and informed.

3. Shoemaker 1989.

Powell is also linguistically alienated from her community, being brought up on the mission to speak English only. When as a young adult she is reunited with her mother, they have no common language: her mother does not speak English and Rene has literally lost her mother tongue.

Brown herself grew up among her father's full-blood relations. She was saved from the Carrolup Settlement after her father's early death when her father's brother married her mother according to traditional law, and cared for the young family — an instance where Noongar custom circumvented white power.

Hazel Brown's opening words, 'I remember', introduce the book's major purpose in recording the hidden but preserved memories of Noongar people that when revealed, transform accepted white histories. Her initial story of men of her family going hunting also alludes to a massacre of Noongar people at Cocanarup in the 1880s. Although the full story is initially withheld, the atrocity casts a dark shadow over the narrative as a whole. As an adult Scott is put in touch with Hazel Brown by Noongar elders whom he met while coordinating an Aboriginal bridging course. The shadow of the Cocanarup massacre falls on him also: one elder, hearing that his family came from nearby Ravensthorpe, declares 'Oh, I hope not, for your sake.'

Born in Perth, Scott grew up mainly in Albany in a suburban government house, not far from the 'rubbish tip and the Native Reserve'. The first home he remembers had an unfinished floor, symbolising his shaky knowledge of his ancestry. Scott's father was the son of an Aboriginal mother who died when he was ten and a Scottish father who arranged boarding schools and a 'succession of stepmothers'. Although Scott's father told him to be proud of his Aboriginal descent, his only contacts with Aboriginal people during his 1960s childhood were associated with violent incidents. He saw himself as 'only ever on the fringe of a community which showed all the signs of being under siege'.

Process is important to Scott as he describes how 'Aunty Hazel' sorts through and explains family relationships to him, preferring to talk about Indigenous family history and stories from her childhood rather than her own adult life. He explains the mutually agreed process of tape-recording their conversations as a basis for his manuscript, a transparency not always adopted in earlier Indigenous life stories.⁴ Scott also cross-checks oral history 'against the scanty written records'.

Scott reviews aspects of West Australian contact history, finding primary sources for Indigenous family history in the writings of early British settlers Ethel Hassell, George Cheyne, John Septimus Roe and missionary Bishop Salvado. Scott reads these records critically, tracking significant phrases, 'first white man born', 'the last full blood aborigine', and 'our native'. But neither Scott nor Brown shy away from the ambiguities and divided loyalties of their Aboriginal ancestors who worked closely with white settlers. Scott concludes: 'I think Indigenous experience can encompass both pride and shame, and can even include complicity in processes of colonization.' Brown is also committed to 'bring it all out in the open', even the stories about forebear Bobbie Roberts, who 'worked against Noongar people' and became a police tracker.

⁴ For example, the text of Charles Perkins' *A Bastard Like Me* (1975) was, according to Perkins' biographer Peter Read, transcribed from tapes recorded by Ted Noffs, although this is nowhere indicated in the foreword by Noffs or by Perkins (Read 1990: 177).

Brown's contributions provide an Indigenous perspective on the colonial practice where Noongar people excluded from their own land by pastoralists were 'compensated' by government rations of poor nutritional value — sugar, tea, flour, tobacco. Brown records her family's income-generating work, dingo-trapping and sewing blankets, bags and boots from kangaroo skins to trade with white settlers. The family's resourcefulness is a recurrent theme, whether supplementing their diet with wild honey, making soap from emu fat and emu feather mattresses, hunting possums, making flour from seeds of the mangart tree or learning to drive a harvester. While acquiring much traditional knowledge, Brown was also learning to read, from cowboy books — taught by her mother.

Brown refuses to classify her occupation as a domestic servant, given that she also did farm work, drove a tractor, became a woolclasser and managed the farm while the owners went on holiday. She prides herself on honesty in words, and in work. Respect is an essential value. She tells of her countering of racist rebuffs and her local activism, including the painful process of securing the deregistration of the white doctor who refused to treat her baby daughter because he was playing golf: the child died. But Brown doesn't hesitate to criticise collaborations between white and Indigenous people where she considers power is wielded unfairly, including 'ATSIC and their black bureaucracy'.

She also commends a few white people for decent relations with Noongar people — the Browns, pastoralists who employed her father; the Wrights, missionaries who encouraged Indigenous self-reliance as well as providing medical services, schooling, clean water, and protection from official harassment; politician Kim E Beazley, who responded to her community's need for a clean water supply. Scott questions Brown's commendation of the pastoralists employing his relatives as farmhands on their own land but reluctantly concedes that Brown's experience with the Wrights' mission community was positive.

Brown records her experiences of community racism in Gnowangerup, where police harassment was common, Noongar people had to observe a curfew, were barred from cinemas and pubs, and where Aboriginal mothers were not allowed to attend inter-school sports days. She notes the alienating effect of jail on Noongars, most of whom, like her Uncle Booker never returned to their traditional land after imprisonment on Rottnest Island, because they were '*kanya-kanya*', ashamed and afraid.

Brown's narrative of the massacre at Cocaranup is consistent with the authenticating criteria identified by Deborah Bird Rose's informants in Northern Australia, although Scott's research fails to uncover any definitive first-hand written account.⁵ Brown as elder, has status as a reliable informant; she is specific about the location, sequence of events and the names of those involved, and also refers to human remains. She begins with an account of the rape of a 13-year-old Aboriginal girl by a white settler, in the context of regular abuses of Aboriginal women. She names the victim, the alleged perpetrator and the Aboriginal man who speared him in reprisal. According to Brown, government permission was then secured to kill 17 Aboriginal people from Ravensthorpe. However alternative Indigenous sources quoted by Scott state that over 30 people were killed, including people from Hopetoun and Jerdacuttup who were visiting

5. Rose 2003: 129–5.

for meetings about initiations and marriage. Brown states that the massacre site is now fenced off and belongs to the Boy Scouts. In recounting an occasion when she and her husband were driving past the area, she introduces an element of spirituality and mourning. A thick mist arose and covered the road: 'Must've been old people crying', she reflects.

Scott's contributions blend the autobiographical and scholarly, and gloss Brown's narrative. Although generally informative with interesting sources, these can be a little cumbersome compared with Brown's pithy reminiscences. As Brown teases him: 'We don't want to bore people, unna? We want to tell a good story. You should know that better than me, you s'posed to be the writer.'

Kayang and Me includes a glossary of Noongar words, a regional map, comprehensive bibliography but no index. At times more precise referencing would be useful, for example in relation to 'the infamous 1905 act and its amendments [which] institutionalised the disempowerment of Noongar people ... and created a fault line between Noongars and wadjelas [white people]'. Powell's and Kennedy's book reproduces actual documents, and provides details of the *Native Administration Act 1905-1947* and later amendments, although Kennedy describes the difficulty she had in accessing this basic information in archives and libraries.

Both books convey irremediable loss. Rene Powell states her aspiration to rebuild her relationship with the Aboriginal community at Milyirritjarra (Warburton). But she can never recover the relationship with her mother broken by the white bureaucratic interventions. Brown, whose knowledge of oral tradition stretches back to the early history of contact in south Western Australia, from whalers and sealers to Indigenous participants in white agricultural development, does not minimise her people's grievous loss of cultural heritage and damage to land, the destruction of waterholes, land clearing and salinisation. She asserts the power of Indigenous memory: 'They can destroy our country but they can never destroy the memories of it. They can change it, but they can't change what we know about it.' But at times her capacious memory of relationships, sites, re-locations and stories falters, indicating the fragility of this enterprise. 'I can't remember ... Sad that I can't. Dreamt it once, that song; woke up with it in my head, but it went away again.'

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Botany Bay: where histories meet by Maria Nugent, 272 pp, Allen & Unwin, 2005, \$39.95

Botany Bay is a name known to everyone who has even a little knowledge about the European side of Australian history where, as Maria Nugent says, it is usually linked with Captain Cook and 1770. The Aboriginal side of the story is of equal importance, but often less well known to non-Aboriginal people, and this book admirably brings together the two sides of the story. Both strands of Botany Bay's history are interwoven throughout the book, which covers peoples' lives and events from the time of Cook's landing in 1770 to recent times. Botany Bay is of great significance to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians for many different reasons – often opposing. As the site of Captain Cook's landfall it represents the event that began the process of European colonisation and, at the same time, Aboriginal dispossession. These oppositions are brought out in this book.

The chapters cover Captain Cook's 1770 landing and the subsequent arrival of Captain Phillip and the First Fleet in 1778; the role of Botany Bay once the colony settled in Port Jackson and its initial apparent isolation from Sydney town until relatively recent times; the rise and growth of tourism at Captain Cook's Landing Place and La Perouse; the visit by the French expedition under La Perouse and the consequences of the events of that time for Australian history and French–Australian relationships; the transformation of the initial settlements established by Aboriginal people and 'poor whites' at La Perouse in its isolationist period to present-day suburbs and national parks; and the history of the industries established around Botany Bay and environmental issues that arose as a consequence of this industrial development.

The final chapter comes back to issues involving the original inhabitants, their dispossession by European colonists and the Aboriginal people who live there today – people who now come from many parts of New South Wales and often other states. The location and composition of past and present La Perouse settlements are discussed earlier in the book, raising issues surrounding the question of whether any of the original inhabitants survived and/or continued to live around Botany Bay by the mid-nineteenth century and later. Maps show the location of places commonly referred to. The chapters are well illustrated with black and white photographs of people, places and events illustrating the life and environment at different times.

This is not a historical novel about Botany Bay, but a scholarly work based on Nugent's PhD thesis. It is written in a clear and easily readable manner so that anyone interested in the history of Australian black/white relationships, Aboriginal history and non-Aboriginal colonial history will find it interesting and absorbing. It is also not just a local history, but situates the events that happened in and around Botany Bay in the past and recent times in much broader national and at times international contexts. The sources – including interviews with local people, documented oral histories, as well as film and videos, unpublished documents and publications – are well identified and clearly listed in a bibliography.

One of the things I liked about the book was the fact it confronts the 'myths' that have arisen about events that took place around Botany Bay – myths created by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about events that happened to both communities. For example, the interpretation of the two men brandishing their spears as Cook attempted to land being interpreted as 'resistance' whereas it simply may have been

part of the protocol to be followed when strangers ventured onto their land — actions which Nugent says are described in later ethnographic accounts, albeit from other parts of Australia (p 13–15). Also, given the uncertainties about the composition of the La Perouse communities, can nineteenth and early twentieth century claims by people that they were direct descendants of those who had witnessed the landings of Captains Cook (p 29–30) and Phillip (p 135) be substantiated, or were those people actually speaking of a broader relationship rather than one that was strictly biological and genealogical? Reasons why such stories are created are far from clear and no doubt differ in most cases, but they are still being created. For example, in recent articles in the press⁶ about the controversial re-development of The Block in Redfern — what is the source for the figure of '62' symbolising the number of 'Gadigal families' killed by the smallpox epidemic in April 1789, given the uncertainties surrounding such things as the number of clans that existed in coastal Sydney in 1788, the number of people comprising each clan, the area of each clan territory, and the total size of the Aboriginal population — not to mention how a 'Gadigal family' would be defined. While almost total annihilation of the Gadigal during the 1789 smallpox epidemic is not doubted, that there were 62 Gadigal families in 1789 is questionable.

However, Nugent's book is more than a collection of myths and tall stories — they only form a small part of its chapters — it is packed full of facts and information about the history of Botany Bay — its people, their lives and the land they live in. In all, an excellent book well worth having — a recommended purchase in conjunction with visits to Captain Cooks Landing Place and La Perouse, respectively on the south and north sides of Botany Bay.

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Shared landscapes: archaeologies of attachment and the pastoral industry in New South Wales by Rodney Harrison, 240pp illustrated, with index, Department of Environment and Conservation, NSW and UNSW Press, Sydney, 2004, \$45.00

Historians can often gain a sense of intimacy about a place that they have never visited. The archivally-recorded places of one cattle station in North Queensland that I studied were rich in evocative names such as Monkey Flat, but not in exact locations. I knew the details of so many scandals and subversions in Aboriginal-white relations that had taken place there on that country. But where exactly did they happen? I decided to go there and to take in the landscape and its history.

When I completed my long journey to this remote location, I met the managers of the station, who worked for a large company. Amidst the dust churned up by loaded road-trains, they lived in an impressive old house with a showy garden full of exotics. As I drove in, hundreds of cattle were lumbering out, giving the impression of plenty of dollars changing hands. The managerial couple were very hospitable, providing me

⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 1–2 October 2005, *Spectrum* 27 and 22 February 2006: 17; *The Australian* 13 March 2006: 10.

with free petrol and attempting to help me in any way they could. But, despite their interest, they knew nothing of the station's history.

'The gardener is an old-timer', the manager said; 'he can help you'. I got excited. With all the English mannerisms and the accent of the butler from an Agatha Christie novel, he hated snakes. With a huge brown snake skewered and writhing on his garden fork, he was shouting for someone to help him when we met.

Disappointingly, the gardener's 'long time' there amounted to some four years. Neither he nor anyone else who worked there had heard of the station's earlier features, the named yards, flats, the waterholes and places I had read from the 1930s archives. They said that perhaps waterholes had been being ploughed over, that grazing yards had changed. It was as though the historical landscape had vacated this station; blown away in the rearrangements of a slow, abrasive wind.

If we class 'landscape memory' as residing in those who live there, the places and their names had completely passed from that station's current 'living' memory. The people who knew all about the station's history, as I later found, were the old Aboriginal ladies now living in rough shelters at a nearby town — right across the road from where I spent the previous night in a holed plastic-curtained hotel.

In his case studies, Rodney Harrison aims to reclaim exactly what my landscape visit could not — the 'shared landscapes' of pastoral histories. Harrison's *Shared landscapes* presents an exciting study that attempts to map the kinds of histories missing in pastoral New South Wales. He is well up on his historical and archaeological theory, and his scholarship is an example of interdisciplinary and community inclusiveness.

Historians have a lot to learn from archaeologists. Harrison is adept at using photographic illustrations, satellite and topographical maps, objects, tables, the material culture unearthed in archaeological digs, archaeological diagrams, geographical, archival and oral history insights. The breadth of evidence used to colour the picture of case studies of the pastoral regions of New South Wales is quite astonishing. His energetic team uncovered all sorts of amazing information. He also held workshops for community members who had once lived in particular regions and stations. Knowledge-sharing unearthed some profound moments.

He cites this example, between a younger Aboriginal woman from Armidale and a local white pastoralist. She had never visited East Kunderang Pastoral Station before.

F: I know you. You're Mr McRae, aren't you?

M: Yes, I am.

F: You are very important to the Dhan-gadi people! All of my brothers and sisters know about you! You used to feed our mother and father inside your house at the dinner table, instead of on the front porch like they were nothing [crying]. You are a very important person to our people! Come here, give me a kiss!

Unfortunately, such first-person encounters are relatively rare in the text. Harrison did most of the work whilst working for a government department as a historical archaeologist in the National Parks and Wildlife Service's cultural heritage research unit. Time lines are crucial, and it is clear that he has done an impressive amount of research in an apparently short time. Yet sometimes the book reads as if it has been written by a committee. Despite all the theoretical sophistication and wide knowledge

of the literature and sources, the style, and possibly the haste, at times detracts from the book's readability. Its style merges the government policy document with the heritage report and then presents 'scientific' truncations on a diversity of themes. Some of the book is very of the moment, gesturing towards a truly revolutionary history of people in spaces and places, historically and in the present. Other parts are very conventional – the factual Eurocentric histories of pastoral legislation and the 'difficulties' faced by those who wished to expand industries and holdings. Some sections have the stamp of the peremptory, cover-key-facts 'local histories' where themes and arguments drop out in favour of an implicit story of progress.

The scholarship behind this book is certainly good; Rodney Harrison is onto a wave of histories of place in past and present; history that uses mapping, satellite photographs, community meetings, memory, historical archives and wonderful interdisciplinary collaborations, illustrated by useful sketches and diagrams. He jolts us into wondering why historians and archaeologists do not work together more often.

As Harrison admits, his study is divided into 'settler' perspectives of pastoral history and 'Aboriginal participation'. Even the chapters are split accordingly, marring his key ambition to present 'shared history'. *Shared landscapes* does not spin a yarn, or tell a good, sustained story. It's a scientific style report published as a gorgeous book. While its scholarship and wide reading and original conceptualisation takes it way beyond the average consultant's report, emotions and the research journey story are very restrained. Until the stories can take over, can be allowed to run free of the predictable academic perspectives, they will not seep into readers' minds, and change the way we think about shared histories.

Shortcomings aside, the book remains a wonderful achievement. It is path-breaking and will inspire more scholars to apply this approach to other parts of Australia. It is also timely – the notions of 'shared landscapes' and 'archaeologies of attachment' are crucially important, neglected themes in our national narratives.

Harrison has made many important steps to unite historical research techniques with those of archaeology and human geography. He has obviously been tireless, energetic and a hard worker. This book demonstrates a methodology aimed at achieving an ethical approach to both accuracy and information sharing.

The Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) deserves to be congratulated for supporting such innovative and comprehensive research and helping to nurture this sophisticated take on its brief. This was clearly a fascinating and broad research project, with an admirable and rapid publication. I commend the Department and Harrison for getting this major body of work out so quickly, with all its new information and new approaches. The book is beautifully produced, with a gorgeous cover; little Aboriginal kids on the back of a patient sheep, standing on a dusty area in front of a layered corrugated iron shed. The book is extremely well illustrated – with historic photos, maps and contemporary photos.

This book will be much valued by heritage practitioners, local enthusiasts and those with an interest in pastoral history more widely. The book starts to clear a new path for truly interdisciplinary, community-collaborative research. With more inclusive use of oral histories, and greater amplification of the resonant emotional stories of shared experiences of place, Australian ways of thinking about pastoral landscapes will

be further challenged. Harrison has demonstrated there are many different archives, including the land itself, and that all sources combine to reveal powerful stories. If only he had conducted his study in North Queensland, I know he would have found Monkey Flat and dug deep for its stories.

Ann McGrath
Australian National University

Australian dictionary of biography: supplement 1580-1980 edited by Christopher Cunneen with Jill Roe, Beverley Kingston and Stephen Garton, xxii + 520 pp, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2005, \$74.95

The *Australian dictionary of biography* is justifiably regarded as an invaluable resource and a notable scholarly achievement. Since its inception in 1962, 16 volumes have included entries on more than 10,000 individuals. Many of the volumes appeared, however, before the great expansion of Australian historical research during the 1970s and 1980s. The *supplement* seeks 'to both capture and advance biographical knowledge brought to light by research and scholarship in recent times' (p vii), with newer fields such as Indigenous history receiving particular attention. Entries are on average shorter than in other volumes, the longest being just over 1000 words.

Forty-nine Australian Aborigines are included in the *supplement*, a far higher proportion than in the earlier *Australian dictionary of biography* volumes. Non-Aboriginal people who had contact with Aborigines are also dealt with. Although the *supplement* focuses 'on Australians of significance previously missed, regardless of their representativeness' (p viii), entries relevant to Aboriginal history cover people from a quite considerable range of backgrounds, places and periods. Contributors come from many different parts of Australia. All entries, as one expects with the *Australian dictionary of biography*, are clearly written and well organised with extensive use made of primary sources. For obvious reasons, the Aboriginal people recorded are those who came to the attention of Europeans.

It is impossible in a short review to discuss more than a tiny selection of the *supplement* entries. Laura Barwick tells the fascinating story of Louisa Briggs (1836-1925), a dormitory matron and nurse who was a leader of her people at Coranderrk Aboriginal station in Victoria, for which she paid the price of being forced off the reserve. William Jones (c1842-1906) was, as Mark Valentine St Leon engagingly explains, an Aboriginal circus acrobat in the goldfields and back-blocks of south-eastern Australia well known for his 'marvellous versatility and agility' (p 207). Tom Gara provides a comprehensive account of Mullawirraburka (c1811-1845), a skilful warrior from the Adelaide plains in South Australia whom colonial authorities came to recognise as a key spokesman. Fulgentius Torres (1861-1914) was, Clement Mulcahy explains, a Spanish Benedictine abbot who undertook significant missionary activity during the early twentieth century among Aboriginal people in Western Australia's Kimberley district. Until quite recently historians frequently ignored or misunderstood these and many other life stories in the *supplement*.

I am hesitant to point to any omissions in a publication of such scope and value. It is, nevertheless, surprising that there is no entry on Billiamook, the prominent Larrakia man from what is now Darwin in the Northern Territory who met George Goyder's survey team in 1869, visited Adelaide in 1870, interpreted for the police, was photographed by Paul Foelsche and at Melbourne's 1888 Centennial International Exhibition was part of the first group of Aboriginal artists to have their work publicly displayed in Australia. There is no other *Australian dictionary of biography* entry on him while his *Northern Territory dictionary of biography* entry that appeared in 1990 is seriously incomplete in the light of more recent published research.

Readers may identify further 'missing persons' but the *supplement* remains an impressive achievement. Many of its entries add greatly to knowledge of Aboriginal history, especially for the period before the early twentieth century. They will do much to enlighten and inform future research and writing. They also provide some wonderful reading that encompasses moving stories and intriguing details. The editing is of a high standard and the book is well designed. An added bonus is its inclusion of a complete name index to the *Australian dictionary of biography* to 1980. Christopher Cunneen, his fellow editors and the 399 contributors deserve our warm congratulations and gratitude.

David Carment
Charles Darwin University

Aboriginal Victorians: a history since 1800 by Richard Broome, Allen & Unwin, 2005, \$39.95

In this generous book, Richard Broome has provided an impressively researched general, and often intimate, history of Aboriginal people in Victoria from 1800 to the present. With its wealth of information on the historical experiences of Aboriginal people across the State, the book is sure to become a staple on school and university reading lists. With its many references to, and descriptions of Aboriginal people, families, organisations and communities, well-thumbed copies will no doubt be found in the homes of Koories, not only in Victoria but further a-field.

The Aboriginal people of Victoria have been well-served by historians over the last three or so decades. Broome's book complements, and clearly owes a debt to, the work of people such as Diane Barwick, Bain Attwood and Jan Critchett. He also makes good use of the scholarship of a new generation of historians like Corinne Manning and Robert Kenny. Most importantly, however, this is a book that could only be written because of the author's long and close engagement with some of the present-day generation of Aboriginal Victorians who are the direct descendants of many other people who cross its pages. This personal engagement has provided Broome with access to material not held in public repositories as well as insights that cannot be gained solely through diligent work in and with public records.

Books like this are difficult to write because they must satisfy two quite different audiences. Broome successfully manages the task of writing a history that will appeal to its Aboriginal constituency while at the same time withstand the scrutiny of his intellectual peers. The beauty of the book lies in how stories of the personal and the particular

come lightly wrapped in historical analysis. The analysis does not hinder the history being told, but there are sufficient nods to the historiographical developments and debates of the last 30 years to gratify academicians.

In terms of the latter, Broome is most concerned with demonstrating Aboriginal people's agency in the ways they engaged with the new situations in which they found themselves. He is attentive to how Aboriginal people saw and understood themselves as 'Aboriginal', although it must be said that he is not too concerned with theorising this, or with questioning key concepts such as Aboriginality or identity. His method is to illustrate by example how Aboriginal people responded to colonial violence, to government intervention and to racism. He often assures his readers that no matter what happened, the Aboriginal people involved were able to deal with the situation without losing their 'identity'. At times I found this unsatisfying, and wanted the author to grapple more with the contradictory and conflicted experiences of being an 'Aboriginal Victorian'.

Despite this quibble, Broome's book is to be commended. It harnesses a large body of research into a highly readable text, in ways that ably map the major historical shifts without ever losing sight of or empathy for the people who experienced them.

Maria Nugent
Monash University

Bluff Rock: autobiography of a massacre by Katrina M. Schlunke, 271pp, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, in partnership with Curtin University of Technology, 2005, \$29.95

This book belongs to the discipline of Cultural Studies and it is here reviewed by an historian, and I apologise for any problems of interdisciplinary translation. My lack of expertise will be very obvious. From an historian's point of view, then, it is an unusually slow-moving and contemplative piece of work. The main event, ostensibly, is a massacre of Aboriginal people which is said to have taken place at Bluff Rock, a great granite outcrop a little to the south of Tenterfield, in northern New South Wales, in 1844. In fact, whatever killings there were (the numbers are completely unknown) probably happened somewhere nearby. However, in the end the deaths are really incidental to what Schlunke has to say.

The book has a striking sub-title, *Autobiography of a massacre*, and indeed, the work is mainly autobiography. It is about the author's relationship with the evidence she uses (mainly documentary and topographical) and with her readers. Throughout the book there is a very strong sense of the kind of readership she imagines for herself, and the intensity of that imagined relationship permeates everything. It is a relationship that is morally and emotionally exclusive. Katrina Schlunke grew up close to Bluff Rock but she now lives in Sydney, and this is a book that tells the story of a city-dweller's experiences in the bush. She writes for others like herself, and in that way the book is reminiscent, say, of the film, *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. The territory being described is alien and ugly. 'Here be monsters', and indeed, there is something monstrous about the inhabitants of the area, as they appear in Schlunke's text – though they include some of the author's own family (and, indeed, not far away, some of mine).

It becomes increasingly clear, and indeed explicit towards the end, that the writing of the book is meant as a form of self-exoneration from the evils of the past. Paradoxically, distance is achieved by stressing closeness, although the complexities of that process are not thoroughly worked out. The need for self-exoneration is overwhelming. The mood of the writing becomes strikingly urgent, for instance, when the author describes her realisation that a family home stands within the likely area of the massacre site. This concern with her own feelings tends to undermine the integrity of the rest of the work — I stress again, this is an historian's point of view. The distinct and varied realities of the past fade into the background. Even at the prosaic but still crucial level of factual accuracy, there is too much dependence on supposition rather than open-minded research. Why take it for granted, for instance, that squatters in the 1840s used Aboriginal labour without making any kind of payment? Much of the interpretation of the very slight evidence available on the event in question seems cavalier and unreliable. For instance, if a man chooses to record a human death (murder or not) with a mere three or four words in his diary, passing then to more prosaic matters, does that prove anything at all about his feelings? It is easy to think of examples to the contrary. Too often in this book it is implied that the dead, and the silent dead especially, never felt much at all.

More fundamentally, Schlunke's method seems to involve a kind of tyranny over the past. There is too little regard for it as domain of real human beings. Its characters become a kind of backdrop for the wandering introspection of the author — as she proves her own feelings very thoroughly, to the extent of many tens of thousands of words. Certainly, she struggles with her image of the European perpetrators, but as one might struggle with a ghost. Meanwhile, the Aborigines become almost irrelevant to the main action. This is partly because the Europeans are, in a sense, her own people, but partly also (I am guessing here) because they left written records — the tools of her trade — and the Aborigines did not. The latter pass in a very shadowy fashion through the undergrowth of this book. Their deaths are mourned, but it is hard to see how their lives might fit within all the intricacies of sensibility the author sets herself to explore.

Towards the end there is a remarkable passage when she imagines herself married and in bed with the squatter Edward Irby — a scenario shocking to the reader, partly because Schlunke's lesbianism is a continuing sub-theme of the book, partly because Irby was the principal murderer, but also very much because, chapter after chapter, she has demonstrated that her feeling for the past — and for the place of her upbringing — is a barbed-wire tangle of contradictions. She comes at the problem with tremendous energy and no small ability, but the relationship she wants to establish cannot work because in pulling her people (past and present) to her she simultaneously struggles to keep them at a wholesome distance. She thinks — in a world where text is God — that the solution lies in writing, writing, writing, but (to a historian) this book seems to prove the opposite.

Alan Atkinson

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Two steps forward three steps back: a Wiradjuri Land Rights journey by Gaynor Macdonald, 138 pp, LhR Press, Canada Bay, 2004, ISBN 0-9577766-2-4, \$24.95

The subtitle of this book is *Letters to the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council on its 20th Anniversary 1983 – 2003*. Apart from one or two explanatory asides concerning Wiradjuri history and the complexity of the 1983 NSW Land Rights Act, the book is literally just that – letters. There are five of them, each of about 20 pages, each beginning 'Dear Wiradjuri Friends' and each one signed 'Gaynor'. It's a clever technique allowing for interpolations, interviews, extracts from Submissions, facsimile letters and any amount of photographs. Indeed, the whole text, as Macdonald in a sense intended, works well as a family album or scrapbook of reminiscences. Photographs of favoured Wiradjuri people appear many times, and the unfavoured not at all.

Of course, the design is more than a strategy of presentation. Macdonald has worked as a profound friend and adviser of Wiradjuri people since she began her anthropology doctorate in their country in the early 1980s. Apart from a couple of years in Japan she has never stopped working amongst them almost on a weekly basis, writing letters, researching, going to meetings, social occasions, demonstrations, deputations. Her published works, almost all on Wiradjuri themes, include biography and academic discussions of photographs, native title and cultural continuities. So many Indigenous organisations round the country have depended enormously on this type of informed dedication over so many decades. The ideology still prevailing in some circles that Aboriginal history and anthropology should be written only by Aboriginal people could not receive a better rebuff than through this engaging book and its resolute author.

The title is pessimistic, but no more than is necessary. Indeed, sometimes it seems that four or five steps back compared to the one forward would be a fairer ratio. For the 1983 Land Rights Act, bitterly opposed by many as likely to achieve very little, was only passed with the simultaneous retrospective parliamentary acquiescence to hundreds of illegal reserve revocations in the previous eighty years. Yet for all its defects, the NSW Act established Regional Land Councils, differently structured and more efficient, at least in Wiradjuri country, than the Local Aboriginal Land Councils (too small and inexperienced) and the later State Land Council (too big and bureaucratic). Wiradjuri people are tough. So intolerant were the residents of the Aborigines Welfare Board and its managers that Erambie reserve, Cowra, was long regarded as one of the most difficult in the state to manage. By the 1980s the experienced and well-organised Wiradjuri were more than ready to administer their own affairs. And so they did, probably more efficiently than any other Regional Council.

The weakness of all Acts of State is that they can be unmade as easily as they were made. Ideology is as important a factor as any in their unmaking. Greiner, NSW Premier from March 1988, tried to get rid of the five-year old Act altogether. Rebuffed in the Upper House, he tried to establish a trust fund into which all the regional Councils would have to deposit their assets. That failed, but in the major amendment of 1990, all financial functions were removed from the Regional Councils to the NSW Aboriginal Land Council. Regional Councils could no longer hold any land or make purchases. Western lands could be claimed only as perpetual leasehold rather than freehold.

The experiment in regional self-management, then, was so short. Some Wiradjuri would no doubt argue that it simply had not been worth it. But for Macdonald and her friends I think it was, not least for the opportunity for real leadership, brief though it was, but for the sociality, the solidarity, the friendships, the dances, the fun.

Several aspects of this remarkable book are striking: the powerlessness of Aborigines in the face of the tergiversations of government; the extreme reluctance of Australian parliaments to come to terms with a brutal past while failing to see that certain simple measures can do so much to make amends. Most striking of all is the productive, warm and constructive relationship between Macdonald and her Wiradjuri friends. It leaps from every page. Her friends recognise and appreciate her dedication, as she recognises theirs. Yes, it's a partisan account, but magnificently so. I don't think that the letters could have been written in any other way.

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Cleared Out, First Contact in the Western Desert by Sue Davenport, Peter Johnson and Yuwali, 208pp, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2005, \$45.00

This book tells the story of the 1964 'first contact' with a small group of Aboriginal women and children who were found living at the Percival Lakes in the north of the Great Sandy Desert. Officers of the Weapons Research Establishment (WRE) and of the Western Australian Department of Native Welfare (DNW) sought out this group because of a threat from the air: three successive test firings of Blue Streak rockets were planned and the missiles were intended to return to earth near the Percival Lakes.

Peter Garrett begins his foreword to this book by noting that: 'Most people view the ultra-remote Western Desert from the air'. This is certainly true of the Percival Lakes, and conversely the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area must, by 1964, have seen many aircraft overhead. On the other hand, possibly only one of them might by then have caught a brief and frightened glimpse of a single motor vehicle and none had seen white people (p 16).

The exploring parties that had struggled across the northern parts of the Great Sandy Desert with their camels in the 19th century had by-passed these salt lakes: Colonel Warburton to the north in 1873, and in 1896 David Carnegie to the east and Lawrence Wells just to the west. Ten years later, surveyor Alfred Canning laid out his stock route to the south and south-east of the lakes. He crossed a salt lake that is an eastern extension of the Percival Lakes and just south of it he noted on his map: 'Number of bucks here came into camp. Another native came on with us.'¹ On his return journey in April 1907, a hostile encounter with an Aboriginal man near this lake resulted in the death of one of the party, Michael Tobin, who shot and killed his assailant. This 35 kilometre long lake has since been marked as Tobin Lake.

¹ Gard 1995: 64.

These were the only fatalities on Canning's first survey but later parties using the stock route were sometimes harassed and attacked and lives were lost in encounters not far away at Wells 35 and 37. It is likely, however, that friendly contacts with the Aboriginal stockmen in the droving parties encouraged some people of the desert to venture north, using the line of wells to reach the Kimberley cattle and sheep stations. Such emigration may not have directly affected the people of the Percival Lakes area before the 1930s.² The authors of this book make some general observations about the migration of the Aboriginal people 'from their nomadic existence in traditional territories to settlements around the desert', indicating that by 1964 'the desert had effectively emptied' (pp 104-107). It seems worthwhile here to look at some recorded visits to this area before 1964 — visits which may have influenced the emigration process, and may throw some light on it.

The recorded history of the lakes began in 1937, when they were first charted on the fourth of Donald Mackay's aerial surveys of the desert — and were apparently named after the Percival Gull aircraft that Mackay had used on his 1933 expedition.³ Mackay marked on his chart wherever an 'Abo smoke' was seen, noting three of these in the area immediately north of the lakes and others farther to the north and south of them. In October 1943, when a team of men was repairing the stock route, an RAAF aircraft landed on Tobin Lake to evacuate the seriously ill foreman of the party; and in November four charter flights from Perth to Tobin Lake delivered supplies and equipment to the team.⁴ In 1953 the RAAF used DC3 aircraft for intensive aerial photographic survey work over these desert regions.

In 1957 the lakes and surrounding features were subjected to a much closer examination by a Bureau of Mineral Resources (BMR) team using a helicopter, and flying over and landing at the lakes.⁵ The party established a helicopter base at Canning's Well 40, near Tobin Lake, and had fuel drums dropped there by RAAF DC3 before beginning several weeks of survey work with a traverse of Percival Lakes. They named Picture Hill at the western end of the lakes, having found 'intricate aboriginal paintings' in a cave there. JJ Veevers, in his account of this work, noted that: 'Natives were not seen at Picture Hill but barely a day passed that we did not see the smoke from their hunting fires.'⁶ On a later traverse of the Percival Lakes they saw 'innumerable footprints leading from one side of the lake to the other'. Some of the local inhabitants had meanwhile visited their camp:

At first shy of the helicopter but nevertheless attracted to the camp at Well 40, the natives required some encouragement before they could be brought to enter the

² Erich Kolig, however, concluded from genealogical data that perhaps 'even prior to European settlement' and certainly from the early 1900s 'Aborigines from the Desert fringe zone and the interior of the Desert gradually and in small groups converged on the [Fitzroy] River area' (Kolig 1987: 31).

³ I am indebted to David Nash who offered this likely explanation for the origin of the name of the lakes. Mackay's maps are held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁴ Gard 1995: 134-136.

⁵ Veevers 1958: 6-8. I am also indebted to David Nash for introducing me to this published account of the 1957 BMR survey.

⁶ Veevers 1958: 7.

camp. The first natives we met ... were healthy well-built men and boys who, though appreciative of the little food and tea we were able to give them, were by no means starving.

More natives came into the camp from the surrounding desert, and in so doing probably leaving the tracks which we later saw on the Percival Lakes. A week after our first meeting with the natives there were an estimated thirty to forty native men, women and children, camped nearby.⁷

When two of the party stopped to refuel the helicopter at Well 40 they saw 'a woman and a boy who ... obviously required urgent hospital attention'. The woman had 'open spear wounds on leg and chest' and the boy was extraordinarily emaciated; he was later found to be suffering from poliomyelitis. The two were evacuated by the helicopter to the Balgo Hills mission and, after treatment there, were taken to Derby hospital.⁸

The BMR party established a second helicopter base on a claypan some 80 kilometres north of the Percival Lakes, and there saw more footprints 'headed north' which they thought 'probably belonged to a group of six or seven natives on their way to better-watered country'.⁹ It is likely that these tracks had been made after the heavy rains that had fallen in the north of the desert in June, when people would have been confident that water would not be hard to find. Two years earlier another BMR party working in an area to the east had reported 'heavy and unseasonable rain'.¹⁰ This had evidently encouraged movement in the north: a party of men had walked in 1955 from the Lake Mackay area to Mount Doreen station in the Northern Territory; others had walked north to the Balgo mission; and groups from the desert were also reported arriving at Christmas Creek station in 1955 and 1956.¹¹ These northward movements were probably by then beginning to isolate the Percival Lakes people, many of whose eastern neighbours had settled at Balgo mission or the cattle stations. But the drought years that followed might well have curtailed these emigrations, at least until the good rains that fell in 1967, had it not been for the roadmaking project for the rocket range.

Len Beadell, roadmaker for the WRE, had made a road through the South Australian reserve to the Rawlinson Range where the Giles meteorological station was built in 1956. In 1960 he cut another north to the Kintore Range and west some 400 kilometres to be used by a National Mapping team the following year for a geodetic survey. But it was the winter of 1963 before Beadell extended this road to Well 35 and beyond, south and west of the Percival Lakes, past Picture Hill, to join the WA road system at Callawa station. In early August, Beadell was surveying another line of road to the south and met 'two wild-looking Aborigines' near the McKay Range.¹² Later he and his team

7. Veevers 1958: 7.

8. Veevers 1958: 8. This helicopter evacuation attracted some press attention and a helicopter pilot was quoted as saying that the people at Well 40 were 'starving' (p 44).

9. Veevers 1958: 7.

10. Casey and Wells 1956: 6.

11. Long 1989: 25. Later, in March 1961, a party of '11 desert natives' was reported to have been found by police on Christmas Creek station; this group consisted of 'two men, an eight-year-old boy and eight girls whose ages ranged from five to thirteen' (*The News*, Perth, 11 March 1961).

12. Beadell 1983: 85-86.

spent some weeks camped near this group, receiving silent 'daily visits' from the men; the women and children kept 'several hundred metres away'.¹³ In November, his road completed, Beadell led a party including two DNW officers to visit this group.¹⁴ The two officers returned a week later with Bob Tonkinson, then engaged in anthropological research at Jigalong mission, and learnt that a second, related group was living not far away. These 50 people included a few men who had previously walked in to either Jigalong or Warburton. They were all offered transport to Jigalong, apparently in accordance with a recently modified DNW policy permitting such offers as long as officers did not 'use any persuasion to influence the natives' decision' (p 140). Most accepted, but those in the second group chose to stay where they were, eventually moving to Jigalong in 1966.¹⁵

Farther north, oil exploration parties had extended their seismic surveys south towards the Percival Lakes, establishing an airfield, Swindells Field, some 80 kilometres north-west of the lakes and clearing another road, roughly parallel to Beadell's, south to the stock route. The modern world was closing in on the people who remained at the Percival Lakes.

In the east the WRE patrol officers and Northern Territory Welfare Branch officers, including me, had been making use of Beadell's roads since 1960 and by 1963 we had met over 100 people in groups widely scattered through an area up to 250 kilometres west of the WA border. These encounters had already prompted several to make the long walk east to join their relatives at Papunya. Reporting on the 1963 patrols, I proposed that we should provide transport for others who had expressed interest in moving to Papunya.

The authors of this book remark on 'the profound effect' of my report on John Harman, the DNW officer based at Kalgoorlie who was responsible for this remote area of the desert (p 56). He at once arranged to make a visit to the area in October, using the roads Beadell had just completed, and then proposed a joint patrol with the WRE and NT officers. In December, officials agreed to his recommendation and to mine, since it seemed clear that the people remaining in the desert were too few 'for the social system to function effectively'.¹⁶ In April 1964 parties from the WA and NT, with the two WRE patrol officers, went out equipped to respond if any of those we met wanted to leave the desert. The WA and WRE officers met a small group south of Well 35; these chose then to stay where they were, but most had made their way to the Warburton mission by the end of the year.¹⁷ Eight families, 42 people in all, travelled by truck to Papunya. Later in April and in September the WRE officers transported several other groups either to Papunya or to the Warburton mission.

During this joint patrol, Harman was told that the oil exploration party working near the Percival Lakes had seen signs of recent occupation near Picture Hill. Because test firings of the Blue Streak rocket were planned to begin in late May, arrangements

13. Beadell 1983: 110-111.

14. Beadell 1983: 142-157.

15. Peterson 1986: 116-117 D20, D21.

16. Long 1989: 33.

17. Peterson 1986: 121 D24.

were at once made for WRE and WA officers to explore the area and discover whether people might be in the planned 'impact area'.

The authors give a splendid day by day account of the attempts to make contact with the people at the Percival Lakes and of the successful efforts of the group to avoid any close contact. This is followed by a briefer treatment of the next patrol which in September succeeded in meeting the 20 women and children who had fled in May. These sections form the heart of the book, and are based largely on the stories told by the third author, Yuwali, aged about 17 at the time, who has been able 40 years later to provide a uniquely detailed story of a most unusual encounter.

Sue Davenport explains in a preface how the research for the book was done and, in particular, how the oral histories were collected and translated. A short introductory note outlines the events in the late 1940s which led to the 1964 encounters: notably, the decision to develop a rocket testing range in the north of South Australia; the appointment of a 'Native Patrol Officer' to look after the interests of the Aboriginal people; and the birth of Yuwali at a waterhole, Yulpu, near the Percival Lakes. This is followed by a short account of the travels and activities of Wirnpa, the rain-making snake-man who settled at the waterhole that bears his name to the north-east of the lakes.

The next section describes the life of the people of the Percival Lakes, the foods they ate throughout the seasons, and the recent history of Yuwali and her relatives, who had been almost completely isolated from others for some years. A diagram, with photographs of each of the people, shows how they were related. Each is identified by a personal name and their ages are shown as recorded when they were seen in September 1964.¹⁸ The three older women, all widowed, were sisters and two had daughters married to an elderly, blind man who had left this group and was being cared for by his three other wives with another group some distance to the north. One of the other widows was a younger sister of this blind man, and another had been married to his brother. We are told that the husbands of five of the women 'had disappeared over several years' (p 14). Apparently two had died violent deaths: one 'killed by a revenge party' and the other 'speared in the ribs' because he had stolen another man's wife (p 14). These seven women seem to have chosen to stay at the Percival Lakes rather than moving north with the blind man.

Having introduced us to the people at Percival Lakes, the authors begin their story of events leading to their first contact with a short but telling account of the establishment of the rocket range. It was planned to reach at first only some 480 kilometres to the north-west, 'stopping short of the Central Aboriginal Reserve', but a second stage would extend it across the desert to the north-west coast (p 17). The plan aroused opposition, notably from Dr Charles Duguid and Dr Donald Thomson, who were unimpressed with the proposed measures to 'safeguard the aborigines from contact'. A committee of officials, with Professor Elkin, provided the advice the Government wanted: that 'satisfactory arrangements' could 'ensure the safety and welfare of the aborigines in the proposed range area' and that any 'acceleration of the de-tribalisation

18. No section names are shown in this diagram or mentioned in the text. The other published account of the group identifies the people only by their section names (Peterson 1988: 120 D23).

which is now taking place ... can be controlled by the appointment of patrol officers' (p 20). The committee had been assured that no 'construction of roads within the Central Reserves' was contemplated!

The next section deals with the appointment as patrol officer of Walter MacDougall, a son of the manse who had spent much of his life working on Presbyterian missions, at Kunmunya in the north-west and latterly at Ernabella on the eastern edge of the desert. It was a choice calculated to appease Dr Duguid, an active supporter of these missions, and MacDougall's task may have seemed practicable in the first years before the range was extended. But when it was proposed to establish a meteorological station at the Rawlinson Range, it was clear that the lives of the inhabitants, who had had little contact, would be disrupted. MacDougall expressed his concerns and was silenced.

The authors then examine the 'protective non-interference' policy for the 'full-blood tribal natives' of Western Australia (p 35). This was based, at least in part, on lack of resources to do more than try to cope with the problems presented when these people reached the settled areas. Officials had resisted proposals from mission groups seeking to work with the 'bush natives', but had not been able to stop the United Aborigines Mission moving into the heart of the desert to establish a mission at the Warburton Range in 1933. Later mission activity had been kept to the desert fringes: at Balgo Hills, south of Halls Creek in 1939; at Jigalong in 1946, when a mission took over the ration depot on the rabbit proof fence; and in 1955 at La Grange, where the desert meets the coast south of Broome. Western Australia was a 'mining state' and just when the WRE was intruding into the reserve at the Rawlinson Range, a much greater area to the south was excised to allow a mining company to explore for nickel. The condition of the people at the Warburton mission and north of there, and what was to be done about it in the context of these intrusions, became an issue of public controversy in 1956.

More criticism came when, in 1958, the intention to fire rockets over the full length of the range was announced. No one could say with any certainty how many people might be in the affected areas or where they were, but the authors quote assurances given by the department and the minister responsible for the WRE, to the effect that no people 'would be inconvenienced' by this extension of the range (p 48). A second patrol officer, Robert Macaulay, had meanwhile been appointed and posted for a time to the Giles weather station, but he and MacDougall were kept busy in the areas to the south, trying to ensure that no people were at risk when atomic bombs were being exploded. The roadless northern areas of the range remained well out of their reach. As the WRE built roads through the area in the early 1960s the two officers could begin to explore the area, but vast areas lay distant from the roads even in 1964.

The authors begin their account of 'The First Patrol' by introducing the members of the DNW party sent to join MacDougall at Swindells Field, which became their base of operations: Terry Long, the officer in charge of the DNW office in Port Hedland [full disclosure: no relation]; a trainee named Webster; and Gordon McKay, interpreter and guide. McKay spoke a language the people could understand but was no longer young enough to undertake a pursuit on foot with any enthusiasm. MacDougall and Long met on Sunday 17 May, and for each day to Tuesday 26 May, we have narratives of the hunters and the hunted placed side by side, illustrated by numerous photographs, and by an excellent series of maps showing the daily movements of the two groups.

Yuwali provides an astonishingly detailed and vivid account of the moves she and others made over these two weeks as the strangers in their two noisy vehicles battled with sandridges and boggy lakes to approach close enough to communicate. Had there been any men in this group it is likely that McKay would have been able to establish contact but, for the reasons the authors set out (pp 14-16), these women chose flight when strangers approached. The story of the pursuit is told with extracts from the reports made by MacDougall and Long, with additional comments by Long who was interviewed for the book. MacDougall soon observed 'clear signs of panicky flight' (p 77) which took the group well to the east, 'between the eastern end of Lake Percival and Lake Tobin' (p 84). Rain began falling, further impeding their vehicles, and the firing scheduled for that day was cancelled because of cloud cover. When it was further postponed, Long left and Macaulay joined MacDougall for a few days. Having won this round, Yuwali and others started north, looking for her father, while the rest moved back to the east.

The F1 rocket was finally sent on its way on 5 June, but 'veered off course' and was destroyed in mid-air 'many hundreds of kilometres south of the Percival Lakes' (p 90). One of several ironies in this story is that MacDougall and Macaulay, driving south next day, found signs that 'at least four natives' had camped the week before near Well 35 and had probably been in the prohibited area when F1 was fired (p 90).

The authors devote a few pages, 'Between the Patrols', to comments that Long and the WRE officers made in their reports on the inadequate time and resources provided for their task. Long concluded that the group 'should not, again, be subject to the harrying tactics which were inevitably applied' and that 'we are probably doing them more harm in our attempts to ensure their safety than if we left them entirely alone' (p 96). Public criticism of the way the firing had been handled joined with criticism of the April joint patrol and the removal of people to Papunya, one critic concluding that 'the Government wanted them out of the way of the rockets, into what appeared to be a crash programme of assimilation' (p 99). Clearly preparations for the F2 firing scheduled for 20 October would need to withstand close scrutiny.

MacDougall stressed the importance of having suitable guides 'closely related to the area and its people' and Bob Tonkinson recommended two men at Jigalong: a young man, Nyani, one of those who came in from the McKay Range area the previous year, and an older man, Punuma Sailor, who had more English than Nyani but did not know the Percival Lakes area (pp 105-106). MacDougall reached Swindells Field on 18 September and made a wide air search in the RAAF aircraft laid on for this exercise, also flying south to pick up the two guides at Jigalong. The search began on 22 September and they saw fresh tracks next day. Sailor and Nyani went off on foot and 'returned with a woman and child' (p 109). The woman was sent off (with her grandchild) to bring the rest to a water farther east. On the way there MacDougall came on two more women and two children and it was then that he was told that there were no men in the group. At this point Yuwali's account is supplemented by a briefer story told by Junju, a young mother of four. Both young women continued to flee that day in the heat, but next day Nyani caught up with them and persuaded them to return to the others. The group of 20 walked in to join MacDougall and Sailor at their camp on the north side of the lake.

MacDougall provided food and stayed with the group as they walked west to a water on the south side of the lakes. After a week there, waiting for his vehicle to be

repaired, he and the guides left the group in order to search the stock route for the other group possibly in the impact area. Macaulay joined him and continued the search until he returned to Swindells Field to meet Terry Long when the RAAF flew him from Port Hedland.

MacDougall had returned to the lakes and Long and Macaulay joined him the day before the F2 firing. Together they agreed that Long should recommend that evacuation of the group was 'absolutely necessary for tribal, physical welfare and medical reasons, plus the women's own request for evacuation' (p 123). MacDougall had earlier reported that Nyani had 'married Yuwali' and Sailor had found that one of the young widows was his wife's 'sister' (p 117). He had also reported that one woman appeared to be seriously ill with leprosy and arrangements were made for a doctor to fly out. The rocket was fired. The men saw a vapour trail and heard it as it came to earth, they thought about '40 or 50 miles away' to the south; Long says that the women were 'absolutely terrified' when they 'saw the sparkle and then the boom' (p 125).

The two WRE vehicles carried the group slowly to Swindells Field, while Macaulay and Long drove south to Well 31 where they met the guides who had found a group of eight people: two women (mother and daughter), four young men and two boys. These were also taken to the airfield.¹⁹ Three DNW vehicles arrived from Port Hedland and an aircraft flew in with a doctor, a woman welfare officer, and Bob Tonkinson. The woman with leprosy and her small daughter flew to Derby with the doctor and the rest prepared for the three day journey via Marble Bar to Jigalong, where they arrived six days after the firing.

The authors then discuss, very fairly and fully, how it was that the DNW and WRE officers should have concluded that it was appropriate that they should go to Jigalong and why the senior women of the group should have agreed to, even approved of, this outcome. The instruction from Frank Gare, the Commissioner of Native Welfare, was that 'any persons moved away [from the danger area] should be returned to their point of evacuation' (p 139). None of the officers had any enthusiasm for bringing people in from the desert, and all were acutely aware that the removal of people to Papunya only six months earlier had attracted intense criticism. We are led to the conclusion that the outcome was very likely decided when MacDougall engaged the two men from Jigalong as interpreters. As in other similar situations, the enthusiasm of guides and interpreters for seeing 'bush people' reunited with their relatives was sufficient to overcome any anxieties and hesitations that the people themselves may have felt.

The Percival Lakes group was left at the Jigalong mission and responsibility for their future care was delegated to the mission staff. The authors discuss the relationship between the DNW and the missions in general, and the problems facing the newcomers

¹⁹ The authors keep a tight focus on the Percival Lakes group and, though they do include photographs of four of the men brought from Well 31, we are not told of any relationship or contact between the two groups, only that the second group chose to go in to Warburton, where they knew they had relatives. First, however, they travelled with the others to Jigalong. This group was recorded by Macaulay and at Swindells Field by Tonkinson (Peterson 1986: 119 D22).

to Jigalong in particular, and examine the views that the WRE officers expressed about the processes in which they were involved.

An epilogue outlines the later decline and disappearance of the WRE and its patrol officers, and the subsequent careers of Yuwali and the other members of the group.²⁰ Perhaps the most striking feature of their stories is the geographical range of their travels in a 'social nomadic existence' (p 184). Since Yuwali's father was taken in with others to the La Grange mission in 1967, it is not surprising that nine of the group are recorded as having lived there at least for a time, but 14 spent time at Strelley. Relatively few, however, have been drawn to live closer to their homelands in 'the Martu instituted desert communities of Punmu, Parnngurr and Kunawarritji' (p 184).

This is a fascinating and thoroughly researched account of the only occasion when the rocket range activities might actually have imperilled people in the desert, an unusual encounter in the final stages of migration from the western desert. The events, policies and practices that led up to the meeting at Percival Lakes are examined coolly but critically, and the book provides much for us to reflect on when we consider our collective responsibilities towards all the people of the deserts.

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Jeremy Long
Sydney

²⁰ The authors state that the WRE only appointed three patrol officers — MacDougall, Macaulay and, when he resigned, Bob Verburgt (p 180) — but I recall that another, Bill Jenvey, was appointed, and that Jenvey, with his vehicle and equipment, was later transferred from the WRE to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Alice Springs, where he was serving in 1974.

Notes and Documents

Remembering an Australian legend: Nancy de Vries 1932–2006

On 11 March 1932, eight days before the Sydney Harbour Bridge was opened, Nancy de Vries was born at Crown St Hospital. Her mother, Ruby Edwards, had come from far western New South Wales to have her baby and she and Nancy lived in a home for single mothers in Marrickville, where Nancy was baptised in the Church of England. But when Nancy was 13 months old, she was taken from Ruby and put into state care. Ruby was told that she could get Nancy back when she had a steady job. Nancy went to the first of many homes, a foster family where she was very happy. Many years later, this foster mother told her that Ruby had returned, with a job, but the Child Welfare Department had refused to allow her access to Nancy. It would be over 50 years before they saw each other again, and the beginning of Nancy's long and heart-rending search for her mother. Nancy stayed in her first foster home for five years, the longest period she would remain in one place until 1950 when, after her eighteenth birthday, she was no longer subject to the control of the Child Welfare Department.

In addition to eight different foster homes, Nancy spent significant parts of her childhood in different church and government institutions and, between each move, she was in the Bidura Children's Home in Glebe, known as 'the depot', which was a kind of revolving door for children who were wards of the state. After reporting to a foster mother that she had been raped at about nine years of age, the mother returned her the next day, on the grounds that she was 'uncontrollable'. It was a label that would stick to Nancy for many years to come, and which eventually saw her transferred to the infamous Parramatta Girls Home, which Nancy remembered as 'the finishing school because it finished us RIGHT off'. Her last institutional home was Callan Park psychiatric hospital. She faked a suicide attempt with four other girls from Parramatta Girls Home after discovering that the conditions were much better at Callan Park! And they were, but she couldn't then leave it. Nancy's 22 different moves also included Malgoa Mission in Penrith, Cootamundra Girls Home and Moonaculla Aboriginal Station. She was sent to 'punishment' for failing to conform to expectations of her white foster parents. In fact, it had been her second experience of sexual interference. But time spent at Moonaculla with other Aboriginal families provided Nancy with some of her most cherished childhood memories and renewed her hope of one day finding her own family.

As a young adult, Nancy decided that she would like to work as a nurse and was determined to break through the barriers of racial discrimination that limited the career

opportunities of Aboriginal women. The staff of Callan Park maintained the early labeling of Nancy as of low intelligence — despite their own reports to the contrary, and would not support her desire to train. She was only allowed a position as a ward maid. Despite this, she did obtain a position as an enrolled nurse working night shifts while raising her three young children Peter, David and Megan. In 1985, then 53 years of age, Nancy was eventually able to realise her childhood dream of becoming a registered nurse by enrolling at the University of Western Sydney. She and her dear friend Eunice became, in 1988, the first two Aboriginal graduates of the Diploma in Applied Science (Nursing) at Macarthur Institute (now University of Western Sydney). While she was at University, Nancy also completed a major in Aboriginal Studies, in which she was a straight High Distinction student: she had certainly put an end to the stigma of low intelligence. She was also a very powerful speaker and remained in touch with her own lecturers by becoming a highly valued guest lecturer herself. This was extended to many community and school events where almost everyone who heard her speak would be greatly moved. She could have an audience almost to the point of tears and then roaring with laughter a second later. There are students all over the world who will remember how this amazing woman touched their life and brought into it an empathy for others that will always remain with them.

It was while she was studying that she joined the Aboriginal organisation, Link-Up, to get help and support in the search for her mother and in the process of reunion. Nancy was 55 years old when she was finally reunited with her mother, but it was a more difficult encounter than she had dreamt of. Ruby, probably traumatised herself by her own experience in Sydney so many years before, had not told anyone about her first child and the knowledge came as a shock to the family. Some reached out to Nancy and some didn't. Ruby herself was ambivalent. She and Nancy spent a total of only ten hours together, over various visits, before Ruby passed away. In an exhibition on her life, held at the Liverpool Regional Museum in 2002, Nancy described her reaction to the brief time she was able to spend with Ruby: 'I beat the system. It may have been 10 hours in a lifetime but it was 10 hours they never wanted me to have with her.' After finding her mother, Nancy remained a staunch supporter of Link-Up until her death, spending many years on the executive and always reaching out to other Aboriginal people with similar histories. She will be remembered by the Link-Up family with the greatest affection, as someone who never failed to promote Link-Up values and beliefs and worked tirelessly to bring Aboriginal people back home again. It was the most important Aboriginal organisation to Nancy for its work in reuniting families. Her own leadership quality inspired self-belief in many vulnerable and apprehensive Link-Up members who will always remember 'Nance' as one of the organisation's most treasured members. As an elder within the Link-Up family her wisdom and courage was acknowledged and respected.

After graduating from the University of Western Sydney, Nancy got a job in the bush running the Aboriginal Medical Service at Brewarrina before returning to Sydney to work in drug and alcohol rehabilitation nursing at Wisteria House. Nancy was a humble person and it was only by accident that her fellow nurses discovered one day she was on the Nurses Registration Board, the first Aboriginal nurse to be appointed to it.

In 1997 Nancy was chosen to represent all those people in New South Wales who were part of Australia's history of the stolen generations, a history that had been told in

grim detail in the findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Report *Bringing them home* earlier that year.¹ Part of Premier Carr's historic apology said:

We are confronted with continuing, contemporary pain, grief and loss, as has been demonstrated in this House this morning. We cannot ignore the overwhelming evidence ... that for a century this Parliament supported laws, which inflicted, and continue to inflict, grief, suffering and humiliation — laws designed, in the words of the Link-Up statement 'to eliminate us as Aborigines' ... I reaffirm in this place, formally and solemnly as Premier on behalf of the Government and people of New South Wales, our apology to the Aboriginal people. I invite the House to join me in that apology.

Nancy always recalled this as the most important day of her whole life — for herself, her mother and all Aboriginal people who had been through the pain of removals. In 2001, she told friends:

They can't give me back my mother, my lost childhood, the feeling that I was loved. No amount of money could give me back that and I don't want it. But when Bob Carr gave his apology it was a removal of all my mother's guilt. The secret she bore alone. It was so important to me as her daughter that her hurt be removed. The apology set her free.

Nancy had been through immense personal pain, degradation and utter loneliness as a child and young woman. Yet she had shown enormous courage too, refusing the denial of who and what she was. Standing up for herself was interpreted as willful and undisciplined, but it got her through situations that would have broken the spirit of many. To those who sought to discredit the history of the stolen generations as just some 'politically correct myth' she could respond, with humour and with a sparkle in her eye that anyone who knew will recall, by proudly stating: 'I'm not a myth. I'm a bloody legend!!'

Shortly after her own speech in Parliament — Nancy de Vries and the Queen are the only two non-member women to have ever addressed the Parliament — Nancy suffered an aortic aneurysm that left her in a wheelchair for the rest of her life. In hospital, she said she had made a deal with 'the big fella upstairs' because she needed time to see her grandchildren grow up in a safe and loving home, and proud of their Aboriginal inheritance. She managed this through an amazing nine years of illness, with the indomitable spirit that had characterised her whole life. Her final years were spent raising her seven grandchildren in Liverpool, supported by her son Peter (who died suddenly in 2003) and her daughter Megan. She continued her guest speaking commitments at community functions, schools and universities and was officially recognised for her community leadership by the Liverpool City Council in its 2003 Australia Day celebrations, and in its 'Auntie Nance' exhibition in their Regional Museum curated by Fiona Nicholl. As a member of Liverpool Council's Aboriginal Consultative Committee Nancy was highly active in the life of the community and its schools. Nancy was often seen driving around Liverpool at all hours or taking herself into the city on her little red

1. National inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families 1997, *Bringing them home: report of the national inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney.

scooter, attending meetings and honouring her activist commitments. Bad weather was never an obstacle. Many friends in Liverpool remember Nancy bearing down on them in her buggy with her wicked laugh and grin, warning 'Get out of my way or I'll knock you over!'

Nancy particularly enjoyed travelling with her family from Liverpool to watch her beloved team, the Newtown Jets, play football on weekends. She was a well-known fan to the players. On top of the daily rounds of shopping, cooking and taking the kids to swimming lessons and netball, she made her history available for an exhibition and co-authored a book on her experiences titled *Ten hours in a lifetime*, a special edition of which was launched by Gough Whitlam in 2005. It will be published later this year by Aboriginal Studies Press. Her co-authors, Jane Mears, Gaynor Macdonald and Anna Nettheim had the privilege of spending many hours listening to Nancy telling her gripping and often harrowing story. The book is not only their tribute to a truly great person, it is also about their own journey of learning what it means, as non-Aboriginal people, to enter into the pain of another's life, one in which we are all implicated.

On 11 May 2006 the members of the New South Wales State Parliament stood in their places to honor Nancy's memory. Milton Orkopoulos, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, offered his 'profound sympathy to Mrs de Vries' family, friends and admirers around the State. Her great personal strength and kindness allowed her to overcome tremendous difficulty with dignity and humility. She was an inspiration to us all.'

The member for Wakefield, Brad Hazzard also offered his recollections of Nancy:

[C]oming into this Chamber in 1997 when we met in a bipartisan effort to send a message to Australia that this Parliament believes that reconciliation is the way forward, Nancy generously gave us her time, which was something she said had been taken from her in her youth.

Any of us who were in this Chamber on the day when Nancy spoke will remember the emotion with which she addressed the gathering, but, more important, the sentiment and emotion felt by all honourable members. This Parliament has proudly led the way on reconciliation by offering the first apology to the stolen generations. It is appropriate today that we reflect on Nancy de Vries, who was such a great ambassador for reconciliation and who wanted black and white Australia to find its way forward and grow through a profound understanding of the need for reconciliation. We thank Nancy and her family for what she contributed. Our thoughts and prayers are with them.

Nancy de Vries is survived by her daughter Megan, her son David and her grandchildren Peter, Luke, Brian, Glen, Kelly, David, Albert, Mark, Gemma and Patricia.

Fiona Nicholl, Jane Mears,
Gaynor Macdonald and friends
of Nancy De Vries

The Sally White – Diane Barwick Award for 2006

The Sally White - Diane Barwick Award is presented annually by the Board of *Aboriginal History* to a female Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tertiary student who is about to start or is already studying for an Honours or post-graduate degree. The Award can be used for any appropriate research-related purpose.

The 2006 White – Barwick Award was granted to Denise Smith-Ali. She is a Noon-gar woman from the south-west of Western Australian. She is currently studying at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education, finishing her Advanced Diploma and a Bachelor of Arts degree. She previously completed a Diploma of Arts (Language and Linguistics) in May 2006, and has qualifications as a Language Other than English Teacher (LOTE) in 2003, through the Western Australian Education Department.

Denise writes:

I have a great interest in oral history, collecting, recording, and documenting language and dialects with remaining speakers in my country. I collect, record and document songs. I transcribe and translate the recordings, and construct word lists and work towards constructing a dictionary.

After I have completed my degree I hope to continue to develop my language knowledge. I want to develop skills working with Indigenous teachers, preparing resources for use in schools' language and cultural programs, and also develop skills for desktop publishing and web publishing of resources. The White-Barwick Award will give me some financial assistance towards this.

Future candidates for the Sally White - Diane Barwick Award are invited to apply in writing at any time, for selection in April of the following year.

Please apply to Aboriginal History Inc. PO Box 3827, Canberra ACT 2601.

Contact the Secretary, Robert Paton 0419 736459 for further details.

Erratum

'Indigenous organisations and mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: lessons from a historical perspective' by Sarah Holcombe, *Aboriginal History* 2005, volume 29: 107-135

Aboriginal History sincerely apologises for a copy editing error that was introduced into page 122 of Sarah Holcombe's 2005 article. The sentence that reads 'The chairman is non-Indigenous' should read 'The Chief Executive Officer is non-Indigenous, while the Chairman is Indigenous.'

Sarah Holcombe has also sent the following letter to the Board of Aboriginal History Inc. regarding her paper and responses to it that she has received since its publication.

To the Editorial Board of Aboriginal History,

I would like to acknowledge that some members of the Gumala Aboriginal Corporation (GAC) Board do not agree with the conclusions reached in some areas of the paper 'Indigenous organisations and mining in the Pilbara, Western Australia: lessons from a historical perspective' published in *Aboriginal History* volume 29, 2005.

Such disagreement reflects the dynamic political context within which anthropologists operate, and within which this research was undertaken. Such disagreements also reflect the challenges of writing ethnographies that are not overly interpretative of their sources. There is clearly a methodological challenge involved when providing necessary background political context in giving representation of a diversity of views, including the voices of 'informants', without perceptions of privileging one viewpoint over another.

Sarah Holcombe
Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy
Research,
Australian National University

15 December 2006

'The axe had never sounded': place, people and heritage of Recherche Bay, Tasmania

John Mulvaney

Forthcoming publication by Aboriginal History Inc. Monograph 14
with the ANU E-Press Canberra, May 2007

'This book meets well the triple promise of the title — the inter-connections of place, people and heritage. John Mulvaney brings to this work a deep knowledge of the history, ethnography and archaeology of Tasmania. He has also been directly involved with Tasmanian cultural heritage issues over many years.

The book is written in a clear, lively style, effectively presenting a comprehensive account of the area's history over the two hundred years since French naval expeditions first charted its coastlines. The important records the French officers and scientists left of encounters with Aboriginal groups are discussed in detail, set in the wider ethnographic context and compared with those of later expeditions.

The topical issues of understanding the importance of Recherche Bay as a cultural landscape and its protection and future management form a major component of the book. Readers will be challenged to consider the connections between people and place, and how these may constitute significant national heritage.'

Professor Isabel McBryde
Australian National University

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Therese Davis is a senior lecturer in Film and Cultural Studies at the University of Newcastle. She is the author of *The face on the screen: death recognition and spectatorship* (Intellect, 2004) and co-author with Felicity Collins of *Australian cinema after Mabo* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). She is currently working with Nancy Wright and Brooke Collins-Gearing on a cultural history of collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous filmmakers and writers, funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery grant.

John Docker is Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Humanities Research Centre at The Australian National University. He writes on a wide range of topics in cultural theory, including most recently genocide in relation to both the Enlightenment and settler colonialism. His books include *Postmodernism and popular culture: a cultural history* (1994); *1492: the poetics of diaspora* (2001), and, with Ann Curthoys, *Is history fiction?* (2005). He is currently writing a book entitled *The origins of violence*.

Françoise Dussart is a Professor in the Department of Anthropology and the Women's Studies Program at the University of Connecticut (USA), and the associate Director of the University of Connecticut Humanities Institute. She is the author of *La Peinture des Aborigènes d'Australie* (1993, *Parentèses* and *Réunion des Musées Nationaux*), and *The politics of ritual in an aboriginal settlement: kinship, gender and the currency of knowledge* (2000, Smithsonian Institution Press). She recently edited a special volume of *Visual Anthropology Review* titled 'Media matters: representations of the social in Aboriginal Australia' (2006).

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Sylvia Lawson writes history, journalism and fiction. Her most recent books are *The outside story* (Hardie Grant, 2003), a novel centered on the Sydney Opera House, and *How Simone de Beauvoir died in Australia* (UNSW Press, 2002).

Ingereth Macfarlane has been the Managing Editor of *Aboriginal History* journal since 2001. She is currently completing research for a PhD on the long term history of the interactions of people and places in the western Simpson Desert, South Australia in the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, The Australian National University.

Ann McGrath is the inaugural Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, The Australian National University. She has worked for many years in the field of Indigenous Australian history and the history of gender and colonialism. Her best-known publications are *'Born in the cattle': Aborigines in cattle country* (1987) and the edited volumes *Contested ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown* (1994) and (with Kay Saunders and Jackie Huggins) *Aboriginal workers* (1995). She has also worked on significant public enquiries and legal cases.

Kim Mahood is a freelance writer and visual artist. She exhibits with the Helen Maxwell Gallery in Canberra and is the author of *Craft for a Dry Lake*, which won several non-fiction awards. She has had articles and essays published in *Meanjin*, *Island*, *Eureka Street*, *Best Australian Essays* and *Best Australian Stories*, and has an essay in the February 2007 issue of the *Griffith Review*. She is currently working on a long-term cultural mapping project with Aboriginal traditional owners in the southeast Kimberley.

Tony Mitchell is a senior lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. He is the author of *Popular music and local identity: rock, pop and rap in Europe and Oceania* (University of Leicester Press, 1996), editor of *Global noise: rap and hip hop outside the USA* (Wesleyan University Press, 2001), and has written numerous articles and book chapters on global hip hop, film, and popular music in Australia, New Zealand, Italy, Singapore, China and Hong Kong. He is currently researching a book about Australasian hip hop on an Australian Research Council grant. He also writes reviews and articles about hip hop and jazz for *Music Forum* magazine.

Fred Myers is Silver Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology at New York University. He is the author of *Painting culture: the making of an aboriginal high art* (2002) and *Pintupi country, Pintupi self* (1986), editor of *The empire of things: regimes of value and material culture* (2001) and co-editor of *The traffic in culture: refiguring art and anthropology* (1995).

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Maria Nugent is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Historical Studies, Monash University. She is the author of the award-winning book, *Botany Bay: where histories meet* (Allen and Unwin, 2005).

Janice Peacock is a descendant of Erub (Darnley Island) of the village of Isem and the Samsep tribe, Meriam Mir language group. She was born in North Queensland and grew up in Brisbane. Her art practice includes printmaking, painting, sculpture, installation and new media, and her work is held in the Art Gallery of South Australia and in private collections. She was selected to attend an international Indigenous media and visual arts residency in Canada in 2003. Janice was awarded a Doctorate in Visual Arts from Griffith University in 2006. She is currently studying for a Bachelor of Teaching at the Institute of Koori Education, Deakin University.

June Perkins is a freelance writer, a tutor, and avid blogger and flickr participant who administers some photo-sharing groups. She currently serves as secretary of a local arts council. June gained a doctorate from the University of Sydney in 2004 studying the empowerment of Indigenous women through writing. Her work can be found in many journals and magazines including *SideWalk*, *Talking Ink From Ochre*, *New England Review* and Baha'i publications in Australia, New Zealand and the United States. She recently won a poetry competition at the Mission Beach Aquatic Festival for a Cyclone Larry poem. More of her work may be found at the blog www.pearlzo creativity.wordpress.com, which includes links to her installation projects such as *gumboots4peace* and her photographic sites.

Frances Peters-Little is a Kamilaroi/Uralarai woman and Deputy Director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, The Australian National University. She was a filmmaker for the ABC until 1995, working on more than 18 documentaries as researcher, producer and director. Films she is best known for are *Tent Embassy*, *Oceans Apart* and, as Series Coordinator, the international documentary co-production *The Storytellers of the Pacific* series. Frances is currently working on a book 'The return of the noble savage' and on an official biography of her father, Jimmy Little, and is the writer/director of a documentary for SBS TV about the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum.

Tim Rowse works in the History Program, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University. He has written extensively on policies towards Indigenous Australians. Indigenous autobiography has been one of his teaching interests since 2004. His recent publications include an edited book of essays about the 'assimilation era', *Contesting assimilation* (2005), and (with Murray Goot) a study of public opinion polling about Indigenous issues, to be published in May 2007.

Information for authors

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Footnote style

1. Rowley 1971: 107. See also Barwick 1981.
2. Fisher to Hassall, 20 July 1824.
3. Fison and Howitt 1880: 96-108.
4. *Evening Mail*, 12 March 1869.
5. Solly to Stokell, 4 March 1869, AOTCSD 7/23/127.

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